

**YOUTUBE WAR:
FIGHTING IN A WORLD OF CAMERAS IN
EVERY CELL PHONE
AND PHOTOSHOP ON EVERY COMPUTER**

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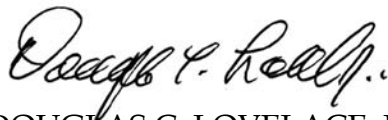
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FOREWORD

Insurgents making use of terrorist techniques are fighting to shape the attitudes and perceptions of the public to undermine the public will to fight. In a modern age, this is done by shaping media coverage. It is not going too far to say that terrorist attacks are, in fact, media events, designed to draw the attention of the press since, without a larger audience, a terrorist attack will have accomplished very little.

This monograph, by Dr. Cori E. Dauber, argues that terrorist attacks today are often media events in a second sense: information and communication technologies have developed to such a point that these groups can film, edit, and upload their own attacks within minutes of staging them, whether the Western media are present or not. In this radically new information environment, the enemy is no longer dependent upon the traditional media. This is, she argues, the “YouTube War.”

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to offer this monograph, which methodically lays out the nature of this new environment in terms of its implications for a war against media-savvy insurgents, and then considers possible courses of action for the Army and the U.S. military as they seek to respond to an enemy that has proven enormously adaptive to this new environment and the new type of warfare it enables.



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SUMMARY

There is a vast literature on the potential for new technologies to create a Revolution in Military Affairs or “networked warfare,” but that is a discussion of the impact of military technology on the way the force itself can be used. Today there is a question regarding the impact of new communication and information technologies in the hands of civilians—some of whom are combatants—on the environment *in which* the force will be used. This monograph argues that the impact of these technologies has been, and will be, great enough that the way they are shaping the battlefield needs to be understood.

Waging war against terrorists (or insurgents using a terrorist playbook) is a qualitatively different enterprise from earlier wars. By definition, terrorists are too weak to fight successful conventional battles. They fight to shape the perceptions and attitudes of the public—a battle over the public's will to continue fighting, whether that is the indigenous public insurgents seek to intimidate or the domestic American public they seek to influence so as to force counterinsurgents to withdraw from the battlefield prematurely. And in the modern world, this will be a battle to shape media coverage.

Terrorist attacks ought to be understood as consciously crafted *media events*, and while that has always been the case, today it is more true than ever before in two ways. First, the terrorist attack is itself often designed and intended for the cameras. Terrorist attacks are designed for an audience. Their true target is not that which is blown up—that item, or those people—for that is merely a stage prop. What is really being targeted are those watching at home. The goal,

after all, is to have a psychological effect (to terrorize), and it isn't possible to have such an effect on the dead.

This means that the terrorist attack is a media event in the sense that it is designed to attract the attention of the media, the same way that a political campaign event is a media event designed to attract the media's attention and thus garner coverage. When we discuss media attention, we are really first and foremost talking about television, and we are really then talking about gaining the attention of the cameras—and the way to do that is to provide good visuals, however those are defined in a particular context.

Understanding the interaction between media needs and the way terrorist attacks satisfy those needs is essential. This is the case because developing strategies to fight an insurgent enemy has become more challenging as today's wars are taking place in a radically new information and media environment, and today's terrorists and insurgents have been brilliant at capitalizing on this environment in their operational art.

For today, terrorism is a media event in a second sense. Terrorists and insurgents are now no longer dependent upon the professional media to communicate. In fact, to an unprecedented degree, the professional media have become dependent upon *them*. This is due to technological developments which permit any terrorist to film, edit, and upload their actions virtually in real time whether Western media are there to serve witness or not.

Several new technologies, all of which have become relatively mature at relatively the same time, together have made this new information environment, and it is this environment on which terrorists and insurgents

are capitalizing. An information or communication technology becomes mature when it meets several criteria. First, it must be available off-the-shelf. Second, it must be affordable, something within financial reach of a decent percentage of the population. Third, critically, it must be small enough to be easily portable. Fourth, it must be available in most of the world, and not just in the developed countries.

In the last few years, several technologies have met these criteria. Cameras of increasing quality (even high-definition) have become progressively cheaper and smaller even in countries without dependable electricity. Laptop computers are similarly available worldwide and at progressively lower prices and higher quality. The software that permits images to be edited and manipulated is available worldwide, requiring no training beyond the instructions that come with the software. The Internet alone is a powerful, even revolutionary, tool; the Internet in combination with these other technologies has the potential to be used as a weapon.

Technology, however, and the rapidly improving ways to distribute and disseminate content that technology makes possible, is nothing without the content itself. Consider that, “. . . al-Qaeda [in Iraq] (AQI) and other terrorist organizations used to articulate their battle plan with rocks, and stones, and sticks, now we see them using power points with laptops and projectors on a wall.”¹ The content is sophisticated and improved steadily (although there is evidence that, at least in some areas, coalition efforts did manage to ultimately degrade their sophistication substantially.²) Media labs are decentralized, (even as media strategies seem to be centralized) and the labs themselves are *never connected* to the Internet. Rather,

any editing, production, and video compression is done in the labs. Once complete, videos are downloaded to thumb drives or (more likely, given the size of video files) portable hard drives and then taken elsewhere to be uploaded to the web.³

How important was this effort to the insurgency in Iraq – and how important was the effort against their use of media technology to the ultimate success of the coalition effort? Between June and roughly November 2007 (roughly the period corresponding to the “surge”), American forces captured eight media labs belonging to AQI. In these labs they found a total of 23 *terabytes* of material that had not yet been uploaded to the web. Coalition forces made the labs a priority target under General David Petraeus because of their importance to AQI operations, recruitment, and funding. The loss of those labs, according to the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), resulted in more than an 80 percent degradation of AQI’s capacity to get new material on the web as of September 2007, critical because it was the videos that played a large role in bringing in recruits from the larger Arab world.

Recommendations.

All of this is made more urgent by the fact that the American television networks, unable for a variety of reasons to obtain usable combat footage on a regular basis, all depend on insurgents for visual product. That is, they download footage of attacks insurgents have staged, filmed, and posted, then use that as news footage as if it had been filmed by Western photojournalists. The audience is almost never provided adequate warning as to the source of the footage. A number of ways audiences could be

properly “cued” to the source of footage is offered. The government has no way to compel the press to comply with these recommendations. Therefore, we must be aware of ways technology works for the insurgent—and look for ways to make technology work for us. The Combined Arms Center at Ft. Leavenworth, KS, has taken the lead here, for example, by embracing the potential inherent in blogging, but these kinds of initiatives will require Army-wide support, both in terms of resources (bandwidth) and education (ensuring users are sensitive to security concerns, for example.) But the primary issue will continue to be responding to insurgent uses of technology in a more nimble and powerful way.

If the truth about an event that has made the news is not known, then by all means an investigation is in order, because nothing will erode credibility more rapidly than to reverse positions already taken. But it is critical that investigations be completed as quickly as possible while issues remain in the public eye, and that they not be used as a rhetorical crutch if there is no real need for them.

If the truth is known, military spokespeople need to be proactive, to engage in rapid response or, if at all possible, to get out ahead of stories that are predictable. When investigations are necessary, the military must understand that bringing them to closure as rapidly as possible—meaning before the story has fallen off the media’s radar—is absolutely essential. It is not about satisfying the press, an annoyance that interferes with the mission. *If the story has the potential to erode public support, either domestically or internationally, then it is, in fact, mission critical.* Because once the story leaves the natural ebb and flow of the news cycle, announcing the results of an investigation will mean

very little. The resolution of a story never gets the same attention as the original story, and the original impression is the one that most people will be left with. Over and over, accusations that the American military killed civilians are page 1 news. Reports of the investigation proving those accusations false, if they come after the story has played out, are page 32 news. Trying to change that approach to reporting the news is wasted effort—understanding the way the news is reported and adapting to it is critical.

Whenever possible the military must be proactive. Opportunities come along to get ahead of a particular story or, on occasion, make news, and the military has too often been too hesitant. For example, when enemy media labs were captured, some of the material found was what might be referred to as Islamist blooper reels, several of which are described in the monograph, and would have been quite powerful if released.

Having footage of that nature presents an opportunity. Circulated, it would have made that group look ridiculous, puncturing their carefully crafted image of competence, toughness, and manliness. Why the hesitance? There was, of course, a famous video released of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, one which made him look very foolish. Apparently, there were negative reactions to that video that led to the decision to hold off on further releases. These polling data were unavailable, so it is impossible to comment on it, but when a communications strategy does not work as hoped, it is often better to look for ways to improve upon the execution of the strategy than to toss it out entirely. Was the response to the Zarqawi video so negative that there is absolutely no point revisiting the use of such material, in any configuration, with any framing or presentation, at any point? Or were

there nuances to those responses that could be used in crafting such releases? I cannot say without access to the data, but surely there is some way to make use of material such as this when it falls into the military's possession. Closer study of the Zarqawi data is clearly warranted—if this material has been found in some labs, it will be found in others, and having a skeletal strategy in place that takes that experience into account would be well worthwhile. At a minimum, determining if the negative response was to some extent context-based is very important.

The problem is that all too often the American military has been reactive, for example, responding by saying that an incident is “under investigation.” That is not a response. That answer simultaneously freezes the potential for response—because what it says is that no *real* response will be forthcoming for an indefinite period of time—and one that opens the possibility that the claims made by the other side might be true, because if they were not, what would be the need for an investigation?

ENDNOTES

1. Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Jenkins, Director of Operations for the Combined Media Processing Center, Qatar, Interview by phone, December 3, 2007.

2. Major David Jenkins, Psychological Operations Officer, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Arabian Peninsula (J-39), Interview with the Author, Ft. Carson, CO, May 19, 2009.

3. Donald Bacon, Chief of Plans for Special Operations and Intelligence Working Public Affairs Matters in the Strategic Communication Department of MNF-I, Interview by phone, November 10, 2007.

YOUTUBE WAR: FIGHTING IN A WORLD OF CAMERAS IN EVERY CELL PHONE AND PHOTOSHOP ON EVERY COMPUTER

. . . modern wars are won on television screens and Internet websites. These are the battlefields that really matter, the arenas that frame the war and the scoreboards that determine the losers and the winners.

Gabriel Weimann¹

Virtually since the day the Global War on Terror (GWOT) began, it has been widely understood to be an *information war*. But there has been too little analysis of what exactly that means, how precisely an information war (fought during an information age) might differ from other, earlier forms of war, and in particular what role technology might play in shaping such a war. There is, of course, a vast literature on the potential for new technologies to create a Revolution in Military Affairs or networked warfare, but that discusses the impact of military technology on the way the force can be used in military operations. The question here is what the impact of new communication and information technologies in the hands of civilian forces—some of whom are combatants—will be on the environment in which the force will be used. This monograph argues that the impact of these new technologies has been, and will be, enormous; certainly great enough that the way they are shaping the battlefield needs to be understood.

The argument first examines the nature of this new information environment as it pertains to fighting war, then considers the power of the visual image generally, and in the context of the Iraqi innovation in terms of the way propaganda is structured and utilized.

Next evaluated is the role and importance of media representations of dead bodies, the role they play in both propaganda and news coverage, in particular distinctions made by news outlets between bodies shown covered and bodies shown exposed. Other types of videos—in particular those having to do with hostage situations—are then examined, and finally the author draws conclusions and offers recommendations for dealing more effectively and proactively with enemy propaganda visuals.

Waging war against terrorists (or insurgents using a terrorist playbook) is a qualitatively different enterprise from earlier, or different, wars. By definition, terrorists are too weak to fight conventional battles. The question is what kind of battle, then, are they fighting? They fight a battle to shape the perceptions and attitudes of the public—a battle over the public's very will to continue fighting, whether that is the indigenous public insurgents seek to intimidate or the domestic American public they seek to influence so as to force counterinsurgents to withdraw from the battlefield prematurely. And in the modern world, this will, of necessity, be a battle to shape media coverage.

Terrorist attacks today ought to be understood as consciously crafted *media events*, and while that has arguably always been the case to some degree, today that is more true than ever before in two senses. First, the terrorist attack is itself very often designed and intended for the cameras. Terrorist attacks are for an audience or else they have no meaning. Their true target, in other words, is not actually that which is blown up or destroyed—that item, or those people—for that is merely a stage prop. What is really being targeted is those who are watching at home. The goal after all, is to have a psychological effect of some sort

(to terrorize) and it is not possible to have such an effect on those who are already dead.

It is for that reason that the military force fighting today against a terrorist organization in defense of a democratic state is really fighting a two-front war. There is on the one hand the *ground war*, meaning the war that has to actually be won on the ground, the state of play on the ground as it exists in reality. But there is also the *air war*, meaning the war as it exists on the nation's front pages and television screens. For a democracy, winning one and not the other will always mean losing, and losing in a very real sense, because the loss of public support means that the war will come to an end, period.

This means that the terrorist attack is a media event in the sense that it is designed to attract the attention of the media, to gain the media's attention, the same way that a political campaign event is a media event, designed to attract the media's attention and thus garner coverage. As in the case of the presidential campaign, when we discuss *media attention* we are really first and foremost talking about television. When we are talking about gaining television's attention, we are really talking about gaining the attention of the cameras—and the way to do that, of course, is to provide *good visuals*, however those are defined in a particular context.²

The New Information Environment.

Unfortunately, developing strategies to fight such an enemy is particularly challenging because today's wars are taking place in a radically new information and media environment, and today's terrorists and insurgents have been brilliant at capitalizing on this environment in their operational art.

Throughout history, terrorists (and insurgents) have gravitated towards the newest and most sophisticated communication technologies available. They have often seen the potential in such technologies very quickly, and have proven adept at developing flexible and creative new applications almost as quickly as these technologies have become available to them. In particular, they have used communication technologies to sidestep the traditional media, which has made it possible for such groups to get their message out to their followers in a direct, unfiltered fashion.

Thus, for example, in Iran, the Shah might have controlled the media and the Ayatollah Khomeini might have been exiled to Paris, but personal cassette tapes had been developed and become widely available for personal use by the late 1970s. They were perfect for the Ayatollah's supporters, at the time an anti-government insurgency. After a sermon had been recorded by him in Paris, copies could be made with relatively little difficulty, for relatively little cost. And at this point each copy was easily portable, easily hidden on the person of an individual supporter, and easily passed from one supporter to the next after it had been listened to. In this fashion the exiled Ayatollah's message was spread throughout Iran despite his lack of access to traditional media within the country, a smart use of technology in those pre-Internet days.³ Today, al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups have found ways to use online video-sharing sites such as YouTube, Liveleak, and Google Earth to provide precise targeting and mapping for operations, continue to explore aggressively the potential of such new applications as Twitter,⁴ and are discussing the possibilities for an "invasion" of the social networking site Facebook.⁵

Today terrorism is a media event in a second sense. This is the age of the YouTube War. Terrorists (and,

again, insurgents using terrorist methods) no longer depend upon the professional media to communicate with their own constituents and no longer depend upon the professional media to communicate with the outside world. (In fact, to an unprecedented degree, the professional media have become dependent upon *them*.) Technological developments permit any terrorist cell to film, edit, and upload their actions virtually in real time whether Western media are there to serve witness or not.

In this radically different *information environment*, a situation where not one, but a confluence of new technologies have all become available simultaneously, the possibility for synergistic effects is created, producing an entirely new environment from that of previous wars. Obviously the Internet is first among equals; a revolutionary information tool in and of itself, connecting the entire world in entirely new ways. It has been suggested that its impact is comparable to that of the first printing press.

The average citizen, meanwhile, has become empowered to film what he or she sees, to edit those images, and then to upload them for the entire world to see. It is an entire group of new technologies, all of which have become relatively mature at relatively the same time, which have together made for this new information environment, and terrorists and insurgents are capitalizing on this environment successfully.

For our purposes, an information or communication technology becomes mature when it meets several criteria. First, it must be available off-the-shelf, that is to say it must be commercially available to the general public, not only to military and law enforcement communities or reviewers for consumer product columns. Second, it must be relatively affordable, something within reach of a decent percentage of the

population, and not merely a toy of the super-rich. Third, and this is critical, it must be small enough to be easily portable. Fourth, it must be available in most of the world, and not just in the developed countries.

In the last few years, which technologies have met these criteria? Cameras of increasing quality (even high-definition) have become cheaper and cheaper (and smaller and smaller) even in countries without dependable electricity. Laptop computers are similarly available worldwide, at lower and lower prices and higher and higher quality. And the software that permits images to be edited and manipulated is available worldwide, requiring no training beyond the instructions that come with the software itself. In fact, while software such as Movie Maker 3 is easily available around the world and easily mastered without special training, it is not really necessary to purchase even something that unsophisticated – someone with just a little computer savvy (and realistically these days that is quite a number of the world's young people) can download free shareware at zero cost or, with a great deal of computer savvy, hack something for free that is not in the public domain. (Or they can acquire what they need from the nonterrorist hacker or criminal communities.⁶) The Internet alone is a powerful, even revolutionary, tool: the Internet, in combination with these other technologies, has the potential to be used as a weapon.

A benign example of what is made possible when these technologies come together was seen during (and in the immediate aftermath of) the tsunami of December 2004. Western reporters were not in place at the time, tsunamis not being predictable events, but there were people there with cameras, people who were able to capture the wave and the devastation that resulted,

(sometimes simply by pointing their cameras over their shoulders as they ran), and to get their footage onto the Internet hours, if not days, before professional reporters were even able to get to the strike zone. Thus the first images the rest of the world saw – and therefore, to a great extent, the first the outside world really knew of what had happened – came from citizen journalists whose images were appropriated by the professional media, for the simple enough reason that they lacked any others. This process is described most eloquently in an essay posted – no surprise – on a web blog, one of the constantly growing number of websites maintained by individuals or groups where thoughts or opinions are posted to the web, and therefore to the entire world.

The Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 illustrates how a physical event breaks into the worldwide public information system. On December 26, 2004, after a huge earthquake off the west coast of Sumatra was detected, some seismologists realized it could generate a tsunami that could ravage vast coastal areas. But this suspicion remained in an informational limbo. The Sumatran earthquake released more energy than hundreds of nuclear bombs, but this physical fact would not register on the world's consciousness until it could be reported as a story.

The author continues:

When the tsunami crashed ashore there were no press photographers waiting for it. It was the ordinary tourist with a digital cameras (sic) and an Internet connection – the blogger – who brought the first accounts of the monster to the world. Sheer weight of numbers ensured that the Internet-connected citizen was in the position to witness one of the most awesome natural events of the early 21st century. Within hours their digital

pictures and video, sometimes shot over the shoulder as they were on the run, and first-person narratives had percolated upward through the larger Internet sites to the mainstream media.⁷

Indeed, mainstream media outlets are attempting to capitalize on viewers' desires to produce their own content. CBS News, as part of its coverage of the NCAA basketball tournament in 2007, encouraged fans to create short clips cheering their teams on—or taunting rivals—to be posted on a dedicated website linked to the one set up by the network for their own coverage of the tournament.⁸ And CNN co-sponsored two presidential debates during the 2008 cycle with YouTube, allowing viewers to submit questions to candidates in the form of video clips.⁹

A less benign example occurred within hours of the hanging of Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi government released the official video, but it was less than a day later before the bootleg appeared—a video that had been made with a cell phone camera and was then widely distributed internationally via the Internet and inside Iraq from cell phone to cell phone. While the traditional networks were still considering which images from the official video were appropriate to show on the air,¹⁰ any viewer with an Internet connection could easily view the entire hanging for themselves, by watching the bootleg.¹¹

Terrorist Home Videos: The Power of the Image.

Technology, however, and the rapidly improving ways making it possible to distribute and disseminate content, are nothing without the content itself. Today's terrorist groups were ready to take advantage of the

opportunities afforded by these new technologies when they came along because they had realized the power of imagery in propaganda (and the capacity of new media technologies to put imagery within their reach for propaganda purposes) some time ago.

Beginning with the Chechens fighting against the Russians in the early 1990s, one innovation in terrorist propaganda made possible by innovations in media technology was the filming of terrorist attacks by the terrorists themselves. The Chechens took the footage they accumulated and produced full length videos, a development that quickly spread throughout the jihadist movement.¹² The logic that led the Chechens to this innovation is on a direct trajectory from the logic that first brought terrorism up-to-date for a world that included modern mass media (meaning, of course, television.) The Chechen leader, a Jordanian-born terrorist named Ibn al-Khattab, justified the filming of attacks in a way that paralleled—and extended—the thinking of the Algerians back in the 1950s. The Algerians’ “Directive Number Nine” argued that it was better to kill one man where the American press would hear of it than nine where no one would find out. What Khattab realized was that technology had finally put into the terrorists’ reach the ability to cut out the middleman—the Western reporter.

He felt that if they killed a few Russian soldiers in an ambush along a road, the impact of the strike was limited. However, if the operation was filmed and then shown to the Russian people, that impact was multiplied manifold. Following through on this logic, Khattab’s men regularly began filming roadside bombings, hostage takings, ambushes, rocket attacks, and other activities.¹³

Hezbollah, fighting to force Israel out of southern Lebanon, was in a somewhat different situation since, while their use of technology to film insurgent attacks for propaganda purposes was new and innovative, they had access to traditional broadcast venues for their footage—television networks, in other words, which were willing and eager to use their material. Thus they were able to combine the new with the old, as their use of television was anything but traditional, since their material was being shown by networks under the control of those sympathetic to the cause and looking for ways to maximize the footage's impact, not seeking to use it in the service of objective journalism.

Nonetheless, the precedent they set is still important to mention:

The visual media proved one of Hezbollah's most effective weapons. Stills, videos, and films became so central to the organization's military activities that it might reasonably be claimed that they dictated both the overall strategy and daily operations. Indeed, *the organization's motto could be summed up in the words: "If you haven't captured it on film, you haven't fought."* In this context, the home video camera was king. A Hezbollah guerrilla unit was accompanied by a cameraman who would videotape their operations from the front line.¹⁴ [My emphasis]

Today even the smallest terrorist or insurgent group active in the Islamist movement, certainly those in the combat theaters of Afghanistan and Iraq, will have a specific position within the organization for the person whose responsibility is "media affairs"—in this they mirror al-Qaeda itself¹⁵—but this is invariably one of the highest ranking posts, obviously seen as a job of great importance and authority.¹⁶ Indeed,

Hamid Mir, the Pakistani journalist and bin Laden biographer, described how he watched al-Qaeda men fleeing U.S. bombardments of their training camps in November 2001: "Every second al-Qaeda member [was] carrying a laptop computer along with his Kalashnikov," he reported.¹⁷

According to Lara Logan, CBS News' Senior Foreign Correspondent and one of the very few reporters to have continued reporting regularly from Afghanistan during the time she was stationed in Baghdad, the Taliban always give the person with responsibility for media and information in an operational cell the number two position in the cell overall.¹⁸

As that suggests, part of the reason terrorists can take advantage of this technology as easily as American "citizen journalists" can is that this is hardly a phenomenon restricted to the developed world or to citizens of the developed world. Laptops, the Internet, cameras, cell phones equipped with cameras, and the software that allows the user to tie it all together, have penetrated all but the most remote corners of the globe.¹⁹ This is "the era not only of the citizen-journalist, but also the terrorist-journalist."²⁰ For this to be useful to the terrorist or insurgent, of course, some of these technologies need to have penetrated the larger societies they are hoping to influence. Obviously Westerners were able to see it as soon as the video was uploaded to their own computers, but average Iraqis, without computers and often without electricity, were watching the Saddam hanging on their cell phones; often those who do not have computers at home or do not have regular electricity do have easy access to Internet cafes, and this is the case throughout the Islamic world.

The latest estimates suggest that Internet use in the Middle East and North Africa is growing at a rate higher than any other place in the world. Between the years 2000-05, Internet access rates grew at a measure of around 411.5% (compounded growth.) Connectivity may be even higher than is estimated by conventional measures because of the large number of people in the region who use Internet cafes or community access points. . . . Jordan even made the Guinness Book of Records for the highest concentration of Internet cafes anywhere in the world. There are more than 200 Internet cafes on a single street in Irbid, Jordan.²¹

Connectivity has grown at a rate of 100 percent in Iraq – but 900 percent in Algeria, 566 percent in Yemen, and 900 percent in Morocco over that same 5-year period.²²

But the use of these technologies is not only a feature of the insurgency in Iraq: if they are being used in a country without regular electric power, then obviously, they are being used in developed countries. In Britain, for example, police arrested a group on charges that they were plotting to kidnap a Muslim soldier on leave from duty in Afghanistan. But they were not interested in kidnapping him to bargain with authorities for the release of compatriots being held in various prisons as an earlier generation of terrorists might have done. Apparently the plan – from its original inception – was to kidnap someone so that the group would be able to film an execution, and then upload that footage onto the Internet.²³ It is believed that it is when the group was spotted purchasing a camera that British security forces, after months of surveillance, finally moved in and made their arrests.²⁴ This makes sense: in this context, the camera was as much a weapon as was the knife.

Or as one jihadi magazine found on Irhabi007's computer (an infamous webmaster for Zarqawi until his eventual capture in London) explained: "Film everything; this is good advice for all mujahideen [holy warriors]. Brothers, don't disdain photography. You should be aware that every frame you take is as good as a missile fired at the Crusader enemy and his puppets."²⁵

Today it is not just al-Qaeda but virtually *every* terrorist group, no matter how small, that has a presence on the web.²⁶ Some groups have as many as 20 websites, many of which are extremely sophisticated, in multiple languages, even with separate pages specifically for children.²⁷ The use of the Internet is not only for internal purposes, however. These groups also use the web as a means to communicate with the public, using the press as intermediary, posting communiqués, statements, and various declarations from terrorist leaders.

Without a doubt, this material is important to their ability to reach their own constituencies and for their ability to recruit from those who have been labeled "swing voters," those in the Islamic world who have not decided whether or not they are going to support the global Islamist insurgency. But these are sophisticated propagandists who are not only constructing sophisticated texts meant to simultaneously reach multiple audiences, they are also constructing multiple texts targeted to reach a variety of different categories of audience. They understand that the trick is that, in doing so, texts targeted to different audiences need to be modified slightly for each different audience.

Iraqi Innovation: Individual Video Segments.

The twist added by the groups active in Iraq, evident fairly early in that conflict (not available to Khattab

given the limitations of technology when the Chechens began producing their videos or required of Hezbollah, with control over its own television network), was to film individual attacks as short video segments, perhaps lasting only as long as a few seconds, so that, for example, many attacks on American convoys have been filmed by terrorists hiding in what amount to duck blinds. These segments are then uploaded *individually* to the web, rather than the terrorists waiting until they have assembled a large collection. This practice likely started in Iraq as a result of a confluence of technology—the easy availability of portable digital cameras and laptops—with opportunity—a combat theater where attacks on American soldiers were, in fact, taking place with some regularity. And once uploaded, of course, these videos become available to anyone who cares to download them. This made possible a radical change in the way terrorist websites were structured: previous sites, even those of groups which were quite violent, had avoided all references to violence, they certainly would not have featured actual images of brutal attacks.²⁸

Susan B. Glaser and Steve Coll, writing in *The Washington Post*, argue that one reason abu Musab al-Zarqawi rose above the pack of terrorists and insurgents operating in Iraq to achieve international stature within the Islamist movement is that he and the people around him understood the possibilities intrinsic to the various technologies coming together at the same time, how to harness the specific technological moment if you will, in service to terrorism. And they further suggest that the way his group has done so makes clear the generational divide between Zarqawi's group and bin Laden's.

Zarqawi launched his jihad in Iraq “at the right point in the evolution of the technology,” said Ben N. Venzke, whose firm IntelCenter monitors jihadist sites for U.S. Government agencies. High-speed Internet access was increasingly prevalent. New, relatively low-cost tools to make and distribute high-quality video were increasingly available. “Greater bandwidth, better video compression, better video editing tools—all hit the maturity point when you had a vehicle as well as the tools,” he said.

The original al-Qaeda always aspired to use technology in its war on the West. But bin Laden’s had been the moment of fax machines and satellite television. “Zarqawi is a new generation,” said Evan F. Kohlmann, a consultant who closely monitors the sites. “The people around him are in their 20s. They view the media differently. The original al-Qaeda are hiding in the mountains, not a technologically very well-equipped place. Iraq is an urban combat zone. Technology is a big part of that. I don’t know how to distinguish the Internet now from the military campaign in general in Iraq.”²⁹

After all, as they point out, until very recently, when the original al-Qaeda leadership wished to release an audio file (much less a video file), they went to the effort of getting a physical copy of a tape to an Arab satellite television network, an old-school way of doing things. Zarqawi’s group (now in its post-Zarqawi iteration), like the rest of the groups operating in Iraq, from the beginning would simply post the file to the Internet themselves.

This does tell us something about the priorities of the terrorist and insurgent groups American forces are fighting. With the exception of the ever escalating offense-defense arms race surrounding the improvised explosive devices,³⁰ there are no reports of weapons being particularly advanced. Rather, they tend to be whatever is at hand, whatever can be found in leftover

weapons caches or smuggled into the country, while the equipment used for the creation of propaganda, the cameras, the computers, the software, has continued to advance rapidly. On the one hand, there is clear and notable evolution in the technology being used in the generation of propaganda, based on what is being captured in the Iraqi battlespace:

Over time technology has gone bigger and bigger. We have seen more hard drives, as time goes on, hard drives coming off the battlefield have become more advanced, bigger hard drives, [with] more capability. Earlier in the fight [there were] 20 gig hard drives, now 40, some are 80, even 120. So we have seen an advancement as technology across the world has increased.³¹

It remains the case, in fairness, that most of the equipment recovered has generally been 3 to 5 years old.³² And there could be any number of reasons for that, starting with the fact that, given the difficulty of gaining access to computers in the country during Saddam's time, the baseline was probably very far behind the curve, even compared to the rest of the region.

Where the technology itself is not the most advanced but is several generations behind, they use it to access cutting edge techniques, and constantly push the envelope in terms of creative applications of what technology allows. For example, the British have complained that insurgents have been using Google Earth to plan their attacks on British compounds in Iraq more precisely.

Documents seized during raids on the homes of insurgents last week uncovered print-outs from photographs taken from Google. The satellite photographs show in detail the buildings inside the bases and vulnerable areas

such as tented accommodation, lavatory blocks, and where lightly armored land rovers are parked. Written on the back of one set of photographs taken of the Shatt al Arab Hotel, headquarters for the 1,000 men of the Staffordshire Regiment battle group, officers found the camp's precise longitude and latitude: . . . [a British intelligence officer said] "We are concerned that they use them to plan attacks. We have never had proof that they have deliberately targeted any area of the camp using these images but presumably they are of great use to them."

. . . Anyone with the internet can sign up to Google Earth and by simply typing in the name of a location they can receive very detailed imagery down to identifying types of vehicles.

. . . A Google spokesman said the information could be used for "good and bad" and was available to the public in many forms. "Of course we are always ready to listen to governments' requests," he said.³³

The terrorists attacking Mumbai, of course, famously used Google Earth in a similar way. The difference is that they had access to blackberries, a far more advanced platform, and one that permitted them to follow the press coverage as the attack unfolded. This was a return, in a sense, to the capabilities of the Munich Olympic terrorists, using the televisions in the athletes' rooms to follow the press coverage and therefore keep track of the police. The advance in technology meant that the Mumbai terrorists could carry their "televisions" in their hands as they moved through the hotels, and simultaneously use them to keep geographically dispersed teams connected.³⁴ Still, this is an advanced, creative application that requires Internet access, but not necessarily the most advanced platform on the market. By the same token, ". . . al-Qaeda [in Iraq] and other terrorist organizations used

to articulate their battle plan with rocks and stones and sticks, now we see them using power points with laptops and projectors on a wall. So overall their [use of] technology has improved.”³⁵ (It should be noted that there are clearly areas where, as a result of Coalition efforts, the ability of insurgent groups to produce propaganda had become so degraded by 2008, however, that they were reduced to spray painting graffiti on walls and underpasses, a technique that had not been seen for several years.)³⁶ Labs are decentralized, apparently intentionally (even as media strategies seem to be centralized), and the labs themselves are *never connected* to the Internet. Rather, any editing, production, and video compression is done in the labs. Once complete, videos are downloaded to thumb drives or (more likely, given the size of video files) portable hard drives and then taken elsewhere to be uploaded to the web.³⁷ (This is known in the vernacular as “sneaker net.”)

So many attacks, whether improvised explosive device (IED) attacks on convoys, the detonation of suicide bombers, the execution of hostages, or sniper attacks on soldiers, have been filmed that it has been suggested that attacks are staged to provide material that can be filmed, rather than the filming being an afterthought incidental to the point of the attack and added after the planning is complete. As Glaser and Coll wrote of Zarqawi’s organization in Iraq:

Never before has a guerrilla organization so successfully intertwined its real-time war on the ground with its electronic jihad, making Zarqawi’s group practitioners of what experts say will be the future of insurgent warfare, where no act goes unrecorded and atrocities seem to be committed in order to be filmed and distributed nearly instantaneously online.³⁸

They continue, "Filming an attack has become an integral part of the attack itself." As Army Lieutenant Colonel Terry Guild (at the time focusing on Information Operations) explained:

They use a video camera as a mechanism to upload data on to a website, to al Jazeera, the way we use conventional weapons. It is part of their Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures. A U.S. soldier does a pre-combat inspection, he checks and makes sure he's got his bullets, his water, all that stuff. Well, our enemy is doing that, those pre-combat checks [but they] include making sure that the video guy is there with the camera, with batteries, to either courier that video to some safe house or to get it uploaded to some website, make sure that what they're doing, that message gets out. And it's engrained . . . [it] would be unusual if they did not do it. A lot of it has to do with status. The bigger the attack the more video and the more media exposure, it seems [as if the more] these guys gain notoriety, [the more they] gain rank within the network.³⁹

How important has this been to the efforts of the insurgency in Iraq? Between June and roughly November 2007 (in other words, roughly the period corresponding to the surge of additional forces to Baghdad), American forces captured and destroyed eight media labs belonging to al-Qaeda in Iraq. Two were in Baghdad, two were in Mosul, one in Diyala near Baquba, one in Samarra, and one in Garma. In the eight labs, they found a total of 23 *terabytes* of material that had not yet been uploaded to the web. Although in some cases the labs were discovered in the course of other operations, coalition forces:

have made going after these media labs or propaganda labs a priority because we know how important these

things are to al-Qaeda operations, we know that they use these videos and put them on the web to recruit and to get funding, so to attack its livelihood we have to go after these things, so we have targeted them [specifically].⁴⁰

The loss of these eight labs, according to MNF-I, resulted in more than an 80 percent degradation of al-Qaeda in Iraq's capacity to get new material on the web as of September 2007. Colonel Donald Bacon, Chief of Plans for Special Operations and Intelligence, working public affairs matters in the Strategic Communication Department of MNF-I at the time, continued, saying:

the Internet is how they recruit and get the money, so I think that we caught on, surely General Petraeus did, [that]this is a huge target set we have to go after, this is what brings in the guys from the pan-Arab world to become terrorists, these videos. Part of it is . . . the radical sermons and whatnot, but the Internet is a big part of that as well.⁴¹

That said, while visual material (and specific claims that accompany it) provide these groups a new and powerful means of attacking their target population's will to continue fighting, they still need to find some way for that material to reach the traditional media for the visual product to be fully effective—it is highly unlikely that sufficient numbers of people will find this material simply by surfing the web for it to have enough of an impact to meet a terrorist's groups needs or for the material's full potential to be unleashed. For while some of their material does indeed find its way to the increasingly popular YouTube and similar sites, even YouTube has only so much potential unless clips from that site "go viral," finding their way to multiple other sites, personal email accounts, and ultimately the traditional media.

To be clear, these groups are seeking to reach multiple audiences simultaneously. The video sharing sites may be inadequate for reaching non-Islamic audiences, but that doesn't mean they aren't perfectly suited for an Islamic one. Analysts are finding more and more of these clips posted to sites such as YouTube, Google Video, or Liveleak, where they have been seen by tens or hundreds of thousands of viewers. It is a significant concern that sympathizers of the cause outside of the Arab world who may not speak Arabic (and therefore lack easy access to the group's own websites) can easily obtain this material—or for the merely curious to find it and thus become sympathizers.⁴² As-Sahab, al-Qaeda's media distribution organization, as well as the Taliban, is now a regular presence on some of these sites. (Simply type *as Sahab* into the search engine of any of the sites to see how much of their material has been posted there.⁴³) Michael Scheuer, former CIA analyst, offers another reason for the regular postings:

Most recently, al-Qaeda's al-Sahab media organization has demonstrated an ability to present, and help others to present, a reliable source of near real-time news coverage from the jihad fronts for Muslims. From both Iraq and Afghanistan—where heretofore the Taliban took almost no interest in media operations—there now flow almost daily, high-quality videos of mujahideen military activity against the forces of the U.S.-led coalitions, interviews with important insurgent commanders and tapes of the retribution exacted from those Muslims who cooperate with the "occupiers." These tapes are a solid contribution to al-Qaeda's goal of reducing Arab and Muslim defeatism, and offer Muslims around the world a third news source option. In addition to Western outlets like CNN, VOA, and BBC, and the Arab satellite channels like al-Jazeera and al-Arabiyyah, al-Qaeda, and its allies have, via the internet, given Muslims another option for viewing the news from the war zones, and one with a blatant but well-informed Islamist slant.

Beyond its battlefield successes, therefore, al-Qaeda and its allies have scored an impressive media achievement, moving from the status of jihadi cheerleaders to that of highly modern and competent media operatives and propagandists whose focus is on influencing the Muslim audience. . . . a pervasive media presence via the internet. This . . . denies the militaries of the United States and its Western allies one pillar of their military doctrine—information dominance. The success of al-Qaeda and the Islamists in the media arena has denied Western military planners much of their previous ability to shape the battlefield environment by controlling information flows. Indeed, it may be that the U.S. military and its allies are now in the position of having to look for means with which to break the Islamists' information domination on battlefields and contested regions across the Muslim world.⁴⁴

But the irony here is that traditional (*legacy*) American media outlets now depend on the terrorists and insurgents for content, so that by uploading this material to the Internet and making it available to anyone who finds it, these groups ensure that it will find its way onto American television network news shows as well. Because it has been impossible for the networks to consistently acquire visually compelling combat footage of either the fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan for any variety of reasons, all six news networks and news divisions—ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, MSNBC (the cable partner of NBC), and Fox News—have made it a regular practice to download footage from terrorist and insurgent websites and integrate that visual product into their broadcasts, almost never with any indication that the audience would be able to determine the actual provenance of the footage.

Further, these groups are so sophisticated that they are producing English language propaganda that

is quite effective even aside from the attack videos. ABC News reported that when one soldier lost a video diary he had filmed for personal use in Iraq, the images popped up months later on the Internet and on al Jazeera—but with the original audio track stripped out. It had been replaced with the voice of another English speaker, one who purported to be the voice of the soldier, explaining to his mother in a Christmas message, among other things:

The crimes by our soldiers during break-ins started to merge, such as burglary, harassment, raping, and random manslaughter,” says the voice. “Why are we even here? The people hate us.”⁴⁵

The propagandists overstepped when they ended their piece by pointing out that it was a tragedy that this poor soldier had been killed in Iraq before he ever made it home for Christmas. Unfortunately for them, ABC was able to verify that multiple claims made by the speaker were false, starting with the fact that it was unlikely the soldier would have been making a “Christmas message” for his family when he had actually left Iraq 6 months before Christmas and ending with the fact that the soldier was alive and well.⁴⁶ ABC therefore posted it as a story about an audacious (but ineffective) attempt at propaganda. Thus while this may have worked as propaganda with the Arab audience, it didn’t successfully make the jump to the American audience.

In truth, in an interview with the author, Lieutenant Colonel Ed Loomis, the Public Affairs Officer for the 101st Airborne Division, the soldier’s home unit, made clear that in fact the propaganda was in this case quite effective: *ABC was preparing to do a story about the tragedy of an anti-war soldier killed in Iraq, essentially picking*

up the story precisely as it was reported on al Jazeera. Despite the large number of inaccuracies in that story, (and what would seem to be the obviously over-the-top nature of the claims in the script) it was only by finally producing the living soldier that the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) was able to head off al Jazeera's story from appearing on ABC News – a story that was created when *a script written by the insurgent group the Islamic Army of Iraq* provided the basis for an audio track subsequently added by al Jazeera. Loomis said:

. . . the only thing that they [ABC News] said was going to pull the plug on it was, I had to put Tucker [the soldier in question] in front of the camera. The fact that Tucker was alive, and the fact that they got the rank wrong, and the fact that there was no way that this was a Christmas letter by Tucker to his family in that he had left Iraq 6 months before Christmas . . . – lie, after lie, after lie [was not enough].⁴⁷

Loomis points out that while the script was written by the Islamic Army of Iraq, “al Jazeera did the soundtrack, reading the letter was al Jazeera’s construct, something for which they have apologized to me over the phone,” although he does not know whether they ever issued any retraction on the air.⁴⁸

Why was ABC almost fooled and why did Loomis have to work so hard to talk them out of running the piece as it was, despite the apparent falsehoods in the claims made by the speaker claiming to be the voice of Specialist Tucker and what would seem on face to be some fairly outrageous claims? Because that is the degree of sophistication reflected in terms of the ability to take a set of images, edit them in a way that seems to match a new script, and have the combination appear plausible (certainly not hurt in this case by having

a network's professional sound people adding the finishing touches). The implications are staggering: in a combat theater awash with soldiers' personal digital media, commanders now must carefully instruct their people to secure not only weapons, ammunition, and other combat gear, but also their personal media, because *any* personal images lost in a combat zone can easily be used by the enemy in the creation of propaganda that has the potential to be quite effective and do serious damage.

The amount of personal digital equipment carried by the troops has continued to skyrocket because the technology available to average citizens in terms of their own capacity to produce information and communicate with others has changed in ways that are nothing short of revolutionary. Digital cameras, both still and moving, of increasingly high quality, are now available in sizes that are not just portable but small enough to be embedded in a cell phone, and this technology is more and more affordable to the average person. Also available is the software that permits images to be edited (and manipulated) right on a laptop computer, before being uploaded onto the Internet.⁴⁹

The modern battlefield is awash in digital cameras, video cameras, and MP3 players that store images as well as music, personal computers, and cell phone cameras. And all of this technology—and the way it permits troops to stay connected to the home front—is so essential to the morale of the force (and, just as important to retention, to the morale of the families), there is simply no putting the toothpaste back in the tube. Beyond mere email, we now have a force grown accustomed to using webcams to read bedtime stories to their children.⁵⁰

These technologies all work together, and they work as well for the average citizen as they do for the professional journalist. (And, of course, therefore work as well for the terrorist as for either of them.) For the journalist, although only 18 months elapsed between the fighting in Afghanistan that initially overthrew the Taliban and the conventional combat phase of the war in Iraq, there was no comparison in terms of what was possible technologically. Camera crews in Afghanistan needed 75 to 100 cases for their equipment, and even then were still not able to transmit the fighting in real time, something that was possible in Iraq with equipment carried in only five or six cases.⁵¹

With the help of these technologies, the modern-day terrorist produces several categories of videos, which are then made available on the web: heavily produced videos that are several minutes long and with fairly high production values, sophisticated editing, and graphics, some of which may actually run as long as an hour; hostage videos, which run the spectrum from videos used to prove that a particular victim is in a group's possession to the final video in which a victim is executed on film; statement videos, which are declarations coming from a group's senior leadership for any one of a number of reasons; tribute videos, used to eulogize those lost to the cause (most especially, of course, martyrs); internal training and instructional videos, which are never meant to be distributed to the public and are often behind password-protected sites; the last will and testament of the suicide bombers; and then the operational videos, the new category developed out of the Iraq conflict.⁵²

The majority of the operational clips come from Iraq, simply because this is where the bulk of such attacks have taken place since the strategy of filming

and posting individual attacks originated (and given that the Taliban came to the game late, for a variety of reasons), and they grew increasingly sophisticated in terms of the graphics and audio used (a reflection of the increasing sophistication of the software available on the open market, software that generally requires no more training than reading the instruction manuals that come with the software itself.⁵³) What is particularly striking is that many now come complete with English subtitles, even if the English is often quite bad (sometimes, were the context different, hilariously so.)⁵⁴

In fact, as far as production values go, the software available on the open market may not be the limiting factor for these groups. An enormous amount of open-source software is available. (open-source software is that which is intentionally made available for free by the original programmer in the hopes that a community of users will develop, in the process assisting the programmer in improving the original program.) And that presumes the user is particular about sticking to the legal niceties—if the person producing the ultimate video is casual about such things, a great deal more software can become available through various mechanisms.⁵⁵ Based on the materials captured on the battlefield, no Iraqi groups appear to be using Linux-based computer software—in other words, they are not using open-source software, but instead appear to be limited to PC-based systems.⁵⁶ This does not mean that open-source is not being used internationally; it means that those producing material inside Iraq are working within self-limiting parameters, either due to resource or, more likely, training constraints.

The gap between the degree of sophistication in videos produced in the battlespace, by “a guy and

a laptop”; videos produced in more elaborate (and stationary) media labs, along the lines of those coalition forces were able to capture in late 2007; and those produced outside the theater entirely, is only going to shrink as time goes by. One company is marketing today a piece of equipment that they are calling “basically a live TV truck in a backpack.”⁵⁷ Now, with “minimal training, anyone who can operate a computer can use it to broadcast professional-quality live video over the internet or on television.”⁵⁸ It is clear that neither the manufacturers nor the technology reviewers are considering possible downsides to the way technology opens up broadcast-quality access to almost anyone with any kind of agenda. Yet if it were up to me, the same kind of export controls would be slapped on this that we put on fighter-bomber parts or Cray super-computers.

This disruption of the normal live video production process means content attractive to niche audiences is now worth televising to local communities or streaming worldwide. “You don’t have to have a million people watching,” said Nelson [Senior Vice President, NewTek], “because the budget of making the show is almost nothing.”

The TriCaster is essentially a high-powered computer with special ports. Like other computers, it plugs into a display and it is operated using a mouse and keyboard. The onscreen interface resembles a traditional TV-studio switching console, but after a short tutorial, just about anyone can figure out how to switch between cameras, add graphics, and so on. I saw how easy this was, and heard countless testimonials about high schoolers and church volunteers learning how to use it in a half hour.

“We had to take a process that normally has 5 to 30 people creating a show and make it easy enough for one person to run, [someone] who has never run a TV show before,” explained Nelson. Indeed, the TriCaster allows

a single operator to mix multiple cameras (higher-end models support more cameras) interspersed with graphics, pre-recorded clips, real-time effects, and more than 300 three-dimensional transitions. The box outputs to the web, television stations, or big screens in churches and sporting arenas.

NewTek's entry-level TriCaster, with support for three cameras, costs \$4,000. That may seem like a lot, but considering that it can be used in place of a mobile production vehicle, four grand is small potatoes, relatively speaking.

The benefit to niche video broadcasters has been significant. Many high schools, colleges, and minor-league sports teams can now afford to broadcast and stream most or all of their games.⁵⁹

While terrorist groups have always attempted to reach the public on their own, we are no longer in an age of mimeographed pamphlets or magazines reaching a few hundred true believers while staying one step ahead of bankruptcy from one issue to the next. In addition to the video segments, CDs and DVDs are still widely distributed, and, most importantly, they too have an enormous presence on the World Wide Web. Materials from the Iraqi battle space are found in video format, as DVDs, as 8 millimeter films, as minicassettes, or even in DVR format.⁶⁰ These materials serve a variety of purposes simultaneously. They are used to recruit, to communicate between the already committed (but now geographically dispersed), and to provide training. The Internet, in short, became the new Afghanistan; cyberspace replacing the lost sanctuary in real space.⁶¹ The infamous hacker "Irhabi007" (literally "terrorist 007") perfected the ability to hack into various servers — most famously that of the Arkansas State Department of Transportation —

to host massive files on the web using cybercrime, such as identity theft, to finance the purchase of websites to supplement what he was able to hack as he created a global online network in support of al-Qaeda in Iraq (although he operated out of London.) The laptop of one of his associates contained 37,000 stolen credit card numbers.⁶²

For a perfect visual representation of how important all of these various efforts are to the insurgency in Iraq, there is the video posted in June 2007 where the central image is that of the speaker, urging those with the ability to do so to take up the effort, not to fight but to persuade in any way it is possible to do so. The image of a single speaker is flanked on one side by a weapon, and on the other by a laptop, also a weapon, just of another sort.⁶³ As Lieutenant Colonel Terry Guild put it simply, “[T]heir media infrastructure is quick, it’s collaborative, it’s virtual, it’s global, it’s technical, and it’s getting better all the time.”⁶⁴ How seriously is this effort taken? One of the leading authorities on terrorist uses of the Internet, Gabriel Weimann, quotes an al-Qaeda-affiliated website as posting this warning:

We strongly urge Muslim Internet professionals to spread and disseminate news and information about the Jihad through e-mail lists, discussion groups, and their own Websites. If you fail to do this, and our site closes down before you have done this, we may hold you to account before Allah on the Day of Judgment . . .⁶⁵

The Uncovered Body: What Makes Insurgent Videos “Propaganda?”

The press coverage of the fighting in Iraq has included periodic stories about insurgent use of web-based propaganda.⁶⁶ Distinct from news stories about terrorist use of the web as a general phenomenon in

other words, reporters have sometimes done stories about specific items posted to the Internet by terrorist or insurgent groups. These have generally been stories about what an individual video segment tells us about the terrorists. They tend to be stories about video segments so graphic the footage cannot be shown in their entirety on American television networks. But what makes these segments so graphic, what in fact defines graphic for American television, is that a *body* is shown. And almost inevitably these segments that are not shown, but which are discussed as news, are explicitly labeled as terrorist or insurgent *propaganda*.

What none of these news pieces seems to mention, in fact what they quite coyly ignore (whether on television or in print), is that these video segments generally get explicitly labeled as propaganda *only* when a body is visible—making the footage unusable by television. When one of these segments was released which seemed to show the body of an American pilot, for example, the release of the segment was treated by NBC as in and of itself newsworthy.

BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor:

Now to another story making news tonight, growing outrage this evening over a blurry video that appears to be the latest tool in the Iraq insurgents' propaganda war against the United States. The video purports to show the burning body of an American pilot. More now from NBC News Pentagon correspondent Jim Miklaszewski.

Jim, what is the thinking on this piece of videotape?

JIM MIKLASZEWSKI reporting:

Well, Brian, one military official in Iraq says he's outraged by this video, while Pentagon officials admit the video does appear to be authentic.

The video, complete with music soundtrack, is poor quality but appears to show the burning wreckage of a US Apache helicopter.

Unidentified Man: (From videotape) (Foreign language spoken)

MIKLASZEWSKI: Shouting 'Allah Akbar,' 'Allah is the greatest,' enemy fighters are also shown dragging the body of at least one man across the ground. Military officials tell NBC News only partial remains of the two Apache pilots have been recovered from the crash site. The helicopter was shot down while on combat patrol Saturday just southwest of Baghdad. The video was posted on the Internet today by a militant Islamic group, the Mujahadeen Shura Council, with ties to al-Qaeda in Iraq and its leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Zarqawi has often released videos of his attacks against Americans as a propaganda tool to rally supporters and to raise money for his terrorist operations in Iraq.⁶⁷

But there is something left out of that report about the way NBC—and, in fairness, all the other networks—generally treats all those other videos.

There is a distinction between how segments are treated by the networks when bodies are visible and when they are not, which turns on the standards American networks have in place for treating images of the human body *in extremis*. This distinction was drawn particularly clearly when a Bulgarian commercial helicopter was shot down (with American contractors on board) in 2005. Two videos were released to the press by insurgents claiming responsibility. The first was particularly brutal. The single survivor of the crash was approached and told to run—which he is only able to do with assistance getting up—at which point, on film, they murder him (he's shot). This video is treated as in and of itself newsworthy, but although some

networks air a few seconds of footage from the video (while others air still images or no images at all), no network airs the chilling ending. Some of the networks using footage from the video were quite creative in finding ways to avoid actually airing the graphic murder, while still being true to their point: the horror of the man's death, and the perhaps greater horror that it was treated as grist for the propaganda mill, for example, blacking out the visuals while continuing the audio track so the single shot is clearly heard by the audience. For each network, the point of the news story is the same: that the existence of this footage tells us something about the nature of the enemy we are dealing with.⁶⁸ The footage may be *newsworthy*, but it is not itself *news footage*, and in several cases, the choice not to air the final images is discussed explicitly. Interestingly, in one case, the decision is explained by comparing the networks' standards to those of the Arab station al Jazeera. CBS's Lee Cowan states this "particular video was so outrageous even the Arabic channel al Jazeera refused to show the shooting itself."⁶⁹

The second tape released was claimed to be of the shooting down of the helicopter. Interestingly, each network presents this as a case of "he said, he said." Here we have two tapes, two claims, and no way to adjudicate the dispute, and so we present you with both. But in point of fact, by the time the network stories were aired, the security company that owned the helicopter had already identified the man killed in the first tape as one of their personnel, which would seem to clearly settle the matter. Thus while it is of interest that different groups are attempting to get credit for the same attack, each of these stories presenting the two claims as of equal weight—and using that as the basis justifying the decision to air the

second video — are simply wrong. There would seem to be no basis for the second group's claim, and therefore no reason to air this second video, even if it is worth mentioning its existence.

But what makes the second video of interest here is the difference in the way the networks treated it, compared to the first. Because it was visually of the destruction only of a machine, it was not treated as graphic at all, and was aired with little comment by the networks,⁷⁰ despite the fact that *if* authentic, it would have been video of the deaths of quite a few more men than the first tape. (The helicopter, after all, carried 11 people total.) After the second video was released, CBS's reporter made the distinction explicit:

A group called Jaish al-Mujahideen says that they were the ones that shot down a commercial chopper yesterday, killing six Americans and five others. To prove it, their video shows the helicopter being shot out of the sky. As disturbing as this video is, it pales in comparison to what a different militant group, the Islamic Army in Iraq, claims to have done after the chopper crashed. A shaky camera stumbles on what appears to be the Bulgarian pilot, the lone survivor of the attack, lying in the grass.⁷¹

By the same token, when footage is used that shows the death of American troops but the audiences' view of those troops is shielded by the vehicles they are riding in, the footage is apparently uncontroversial, judging from the lack of negative reaction to the practice; it has become the norm, and as such it is unquestioned. The footage is acceptable, in other words, because although the bodies are *present*, they are not *visible*. Yet when one network aired footage showing the death of American troops out in the open—even though they clearly identified the footage as enemy propaganda and even though the penultimate scenes, just before

the soldiers killed by enemy snipers slumped forward, were blacked out—it was the cause of considerable controversy.⁷²

The first thing that made that story problematic was that, while the footage was, to be sure, repeatedly identified as propaganda, the story was not contextualized as a story *about* enemy propaganda practices, as had been the case with prior stories involving footage showing American deaths out in the open. Instead, the fact that this was propaganda material was acknowledged and then set aside and the story was then contextualized as a substantive story about enemy tactics: what did the footage tell us about the enemy practice of killing American soldiers by using sniper teams? In other words, this may have been propaganda, but it was treated as conveying legitimate, trustworthy information that was worth evaluating on the merits all the same.

Certainly most news stories that label the segments as propaganda *never* mention that the websites where these segments are generally found are also a regular source for the news networks—that would mean admitting that material they are themselves explicitly labeling as enemy propaganda in one context is also being used by them in another context as a source for material on a regular basis, and very often without any particular identification that tells the viewer what the original source was.⁷³ Thus it is general practice for footage to be identified explicitly as propaganda when men are killed *outside* their vehicles, but to never be identified that way when they are killed while *inside* their vehicles, as even when footage is sourced to the enemy, it is not explicitly labeled as propaganda. (The CNN story is only barely an exception, since despite the fact that the material is identified explicitly as

propaganda, that quickly becomes relatively incidental to the story.)

Thus when the body or bodies are shielded from view by a vehicle and the footage is therefore not treated by the broadcast press as propaganda, it instead becomes available to be treated as news footage. It then can be seamlessly integrated into the regular coverage of the war, not to illustrate a point about the terrorists as in feature stories, but to illustrate the attacks on convoys, to illustrate the daily round of events, just as if it had been provided by AP or Reuters or indeed the networks' own cameramen. It is the way CNN diverges from this practice that made their piece so controversial—their footage was of soldiers being killed out in the open, but their story was not about the footage's power or the fact it was being used as propaganda but about its substantive value, its value as *information*, presumably the exact opposite of propaganda. It should be noted that CNN did not acquire these particular images by downloading them from the Internet, but rather the images were sent to CNN by the group in question, which is what made them exclusive. That only added to the controversy, however. Clearly, in showing the material, CNN was doing exactly what this group *wanted* them to do. You do not send material to CNN as a general practice because you want them to keep it private. While material is also posted to the Internet because a group wants to share it with a larger audience, the circumstances of the case seemed to highlight the choice made by all the networks on a regular basis, to give the enemy far greater access to an American audience than they could ever hope to acquire without the media's assistance. Indeed, in this case CNN was up front about that fact and even claimed the group had larger ambitions for their message. The show's anchor, Anderson Cooper, said

the “insurgents [were] delivering a deadly message, *aiming for a global audience*,”⁷⁴ and seconds later, apparently with no sense of irony, welcomed “our viewers watching on CNN International.”⁷⁵

Sometimes the segments are shown with visual and aural cues that they were taken from a terrorist or insurgent site, although rarely sufficient ones, given that no effort has ever been taken to explicitly address the fact that this is a normal journalistic practice. (It is certainly true that periodic stories refer to claims being made by these groups on their websites, so that the audience might be casually aware that reporters and networks regularly monitor such sites,⁷⁶ but that is a far cry from discussing the practice of using these sites as a source of visual product.) Sometimes there are no cues at all, but the fact is that these segments are downloaded and used in this fashion by all six networks on a fairly regular basis.⁷⁷

CNN, CBS, and most recently NBC on rare occasions have imposed a graphic—called a chyron—that states INSURGENT VIDEO on at least some of the material, a parallel to the practice all networks use when showing material received from the Department of Defense (DoD), when networks use a graphic saying something along the line of DOD FILE FOOTAGE. This seems to be not just a perfectly acceptable solution, but in fact a quite elegant one, so long as it is applied consistently—meaning whenever terrorist or insurgent websites are the source of the footage—and throughout the length of the footage, which does not so far seem to be the case for some reason for any of the three networks. In fact, doing this inconsistently might be worse than never doing it at all, since viewers might believe that any time the graphic is missing, the footage must by definition not come from insurgent sources.⁷⁸

And although they do not do it in all cases, that graphic is visible, clearly imposed on the sniper videos that were so controversial when aired by CNN. Ironically, since the whole point of the discussion was that these videos had been received from an insurgent group, this is the one case where such a graphic might have been superfluous.

If this can be done with footage from DoD, it is hard to understand why this cannot be done with footage from enemy sources. The argument that leaving whatever graphics the groups themselves might have superimposed on the footage in place is sufficient seems unpersuasive, given how few Americans read Arabic. For many of these videos, simply leaving the original Arabic graphics up as they were on the original video will not be enough of a cue since—probably by design—they may mimic the layout of those on a news site, for example using a news “crawl” on the bottom. With the groups’ logo either too small to see clearly or unknown to most Americans, the graphics alone might leave a viewer thinking the footage had been taken from an Arabic language news network. However, leaving the graphics up and then also leaving the audio track in place and simply lowering the volume so that the reporter’s voice can be heard is an alternative networks have sometimes used to great effect since the musical selections, often heavily based on chanting of “Allahu Akhbar,” leaves little doubt that the footage has been pulled from a propaganda video and not a news site.⁷⁹

Another alternative available to the networks is one that can be drawn directly from the way they already cover political campaigns today. Every campaign cycle, political reporters do stories on campaign ads that are particularly interesting either because they

are especially negative, or because they deploy a new technique in campaign ads, or perhaps because they are simply proving especially effective. Such stories always include clips from the ads for obvious reasons. A number of election cycles ago, an elaborate study involving hundreds of subjects demonstrated fairly conclusively that the normal practice of all the networks at the time, where the clip was shown taking up the full television screen, confused viewers (perhaps because they tended to watch the news while engaged in other activities—getting dinner ready, putting kids to bed, helping older kids with homework, paying bills, etc.) As a result, almost universally when these clips aired, the context—a news story about the process of the campaign—was lost, and viewers simply assumed the ad was being aired again. The networks, in effect, were providing the campaigns with millions of dollars worth of free advertising, and legitimizing any negative or misleading claims they were in fact attempting to critique.⁸⁰

The scholar who conducted those studies, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, called for the networks to adopt a “visual grammar” where clips from campaign ads would be shown imposed on a graphic of a television set, so that it would be immediately obvious that viewers were not simply viewing another run of the ad. (She suggested a wide variety of visual cues beyond that one, but this visual grammar was the most important suggestion she had to offer.) In 1996 her suggestion was picked up by a Pew Trusts panel, and soon after the networks adopted it as standard practice.⁸¹ It has, of course, since been updated so that some ads are shown using a graphic of a laptop to signify a web-based ad.

The networks, in other words, already have these graphics and the procedures for using them in place and

use them on a regular basis (at least every 4 years) with no apparent difficulties. If this method is considered necessary to keep viewers from misunderstanding and believing the networks are presenting material actually produced by political campaigns, should it not be considered equally appropriate and necessary to keep viewers from believing the networks are the source of material produced by those responsible for the deaths of American soldiers and marines—not to mention innocent civilians—in order to produce the footage?

Let there be no mistake, this footage is shot by terrorists and insurgents of attacks perhaps staged for the explicit purpose of providing material for filming. Imagine the outcry if it were suggested the networks rely on footage of campaign events shot by photographers on the staffs of the campaigns for their coverage. Indeed, we do not need to imagine it, for the press has never accepted the idea that even relatively innocuous photographs of fairly formulaic events could be provided by official White House photographers in place of their being granted access themselves. The President of the White House News Photographers Association (WHNPA) had this to say about instances where official White House photographers' images (called "releases," "photo releases," or "handout photos") were the only ones made available (or, indeed, were simply the shots chosen by news agencies):

If we truly want to improve coverage at the White House and maintain credibility as journalists, we must press the decision makers at our news organizations not to use handout photos and strongly encourage independent press coverage of the daily activities of the President."⁸²

In fact, she said, "I pointed out that with the significant numbers of White House 'photo releases,' White House photographers are crossing the line from documentary photographers to White House PR photographers." The point is that as "long as independent photo-journalists are excluded from coverage of the daily activities of the President, coverage of the White House is compromised."⁸³

The contradiction is fairly sharp. One set of photojournalists argues that unless independent press photographers cover every event, no matter how mundane or banal and no matter how few choices might seem available for representing the scene visually (the WHNPA President specifically mentions the photographs of the President looking out the window of Air Force One after Hurricane Katrina as a triumph for her organization's members), then the coverage is completely compromised. *The people staging an event cannot be the same ones providing the images of it.* That is the clear standard articulated. Yet in the second case, which would seem so much more charged, so much more open to the photographer's ability to alter what we see, news outlets are more than happy to accept footage provided by the very people staging the event being filmed, when the event – and the footage – seems likely to be far more subject to manipulation than what results from a standardized, even ritual, public meeting of the President with some foreign official – which is, at the end of the day, two middle-aged guys sitting side by side in easy chairs.

It is worth noting that the kinds of photographs the members of the WHNPA are so concerned with always appear with captions, and those captions almost always include credits. News outlets, in other words, provide transparency for their audiences so that when the photographic images they use have been provided

by the White House and not their own staff, their readers have a way, with very little effort, of discovering that. If network news divisions feel they have no alternative to taking visual product from insurgent websites, just as they sometimes have no alternative to taking visual imagery from DoD (or the White House) because no other images are available, then they owe their viewers transparency: the audience needs a way to know where the images came from, and who produced them. Why would that be necessary if the images were produced by DoD but not necessary if they were produced by the nation's enemies?

Perhaps more important than the fact that the footage has been shot by these groups is that they are all *edited* by terrorists and insurgents, even if they are then edited again by network personnel. It is propaganda material, not news footage, or else the very idea of a difference between the two has no meaning whatsoever. As Ben Venzke articulates it, the "videos are a form of follow-on psychological attack on the victims and societies the group is targeting. They are designed to amplify the effects of attacks . . ." ⁸⁴ Hoffman writes about terrorist use of the web generally, rather than about these segments specifically, but gives an assessment that is clearly applicable here:

It [the web] also enables terrorists to undertake what Denning has termed "perception management": in other words, they can use it to portray themselves and their actions in precisely the light and context they wish—unencumbered by the filter, screening, and spin of established media. The internet also facilitates their engagement in what has been referred to as "information laundering," taking an interesting or provocative video clip and/or sound bite, and featuring it and focusing on it and creating an "internet buzz" about it in the hope that it will move into the mainstream press. ⁸⁵

They no longer have to try to create “buzz” to move a clip into the mainstream press: they are now the press’s primary source of news footage when it comes to the vital issue of attacks on American military personnel in Iraq. All they have to do is make the material available.

Consider again the sniper tapes aired by CNN. While they made for particularly powerful propaganda material because of the strength of the visceral emotional reaction they inevitably evoked, they presented a distorted view of the threat faced by American troops. The numbers tell the tale: as of mid-February 2007, sniper fire had accounted for 1.3 percent of all American deaths in Iraq, the least likely cause of hostile fire responsible for a combat death and less likely to kill American service members than nonhostile weapons discharge. Since the start of the war, 41 Americans had been killed by sniper fire compared to 1,134 killed by IEDs, the single greatest risk to American military personnel and responsible for 36.3 percent of all American military deaths in Iraq.⁸⁶

Lara Logan, CBS’s senior correspondent in Baghdad at the time, argues that the practice of using terrorist and insurgent footage is a legitimate one for several reasons. First and foremost, she argues that since there is no other way this footage could have been acquired, people would simply assume the source although she is very clear that she is always very specific with viewers as to what the source is. She believes the audience would make this assumption in part because of the difference in quality – network professionals do not produce grainy black and white footage.⁸⁷ Without empirical research, there is no way to answer the

question, but I am highly skeptical of this position. I suspect if nothing is said one way or the other, most viewers would likely assume footage is provided by news crews or simply not think about the question at all, since I do not believe most Americans are aware there is no other way the footage could have been acquired: the constraints on reporting this war are new to *this* war. (This is based in part on the anecdotal experience of a number of public presentations on the topic. In my experience, audiences, including military audiences, are inevitably surprised to learn network visual material is sourced in this way.) Networks now air footage of low, amateurish quality in any number of circumstances, most often when the footage is of breaking news events and has been provided by so-called “citizen-journalists” —in other words, people who just happened to be in the vicinity with a cell phone camera and had the wits to start filming when something newsworthy happened in front of them. If audiences think about this footage at all, most people probably assume it falls in that category and that it was shot by American soldiers, in other words by those targeted by the attack, not by those launching it.

While the constraints on professional journalists have been discussed in detail in the various venues where the coverage of the war is itself the topic (trade publications focused on journalism, for example), there has been little or no mention of those constraints built into the *actual* reporting so that the mass audience may be only vaguely aware of them, if at all. If it is simply impossible to report without using this footage, it would seem that given how this practice seems to clash with journalistic norms and practices in other areas, the very least that is required is stringent requirements to assure transparency. Rather than making the assumption that their audiences must know what the

source of the footage is, the networks need to do everything possible to assure that there can be no question whatsoever as to the source of a particular piece of footage.

Making it even less likely this footage will be detected by the average viewer is that in the majority of cases, this footage is integrated quite seamlessly into news pieces, and the editor is often drawing as little attention as possible to the differences between the footage acquired by network professionals and that acquired from terrorists or insurgents.

If one watches John Yang's February 7, 2007, piece, aired on NBC, on a series of American helicopters having been shot down in Iraq, there is (with the exception of one very brief shot lasting less than 5 seconds) absolutely no way to tell that terrorist video is being used: the jumps between terrorist footage, that apparently shot by network cameramen (it is possible some of it might be DoD footage, as well), and that shot during an earlier battle with the cell phone of an Iraqi soldier; are all seamless.⁸⁸ If a viewer did not know what they should be looking for—or that they should be looking for it—it is hard to imagine they would notice it. ABC used the same terrorist-provided footage, but because Martha Raddatz's piece began with that footage and used a continuous stretch of it at the beginning, rather than integrating it throughout the piece, it is somewhat easier to notice, particularly in contrast to that shot by ABC personnel and used throughout the rest of the piece.⁸⁹ CBS's Logan, on the other hand, did clearly identify the source of the video she acquired from the Islamic State of Iraq. She said:

CBS News has learned that their transport helicopter was shot down during what the military called "routine operations." But before the US could announce the

cause of the crash, a jihadi Website linked to al-Qaeda was already declaring victory. It said, quote, "The Air Defense Division of the Islamic State of Iraq has succeeded in shooting down and completely burning a Chinook helicopter." There was no way to verify their claim, but the same group *posted this video* on the Internet last weekend, boasting they shot down a US attack helicopter close to Baghdad.⁹⁰ [Author's emphasis]

That does, indeed, seem to be about as fair to the viewer as possible. These choices, however, reflect those made by particular reporters and producers on a particular night. Part of the problem is that there does not seem to be any consistent standards or policies concerning the use of this material. And part of the problem is that while some of these videos are poorly made with extremely low-tech equipment (hand held cameras, perhaps cell phone cameras), others are of extremely high quality made with high end equipment and are very difficult to distinguish from what professionals would have produced. Indeed, that may be because professional equipment was used to produce them. Some of the videos have been so professionally done that the individual responsible for processing all media artifacts captured on the Iraqi battlefield as of December 2007 is convinced that some of the insurgent videos were produced using al Jazeera facilities and was willing to go on the record with that claim.⁹¹ Some reporters believe there is simply no difference; that the point of view or perspective reflected in this footage, in other words, is no different from what would be reflected in the footage that would have been shot by a network cameraman had he or she been on the scene.

The idea that footage shot by a professional photojournalist and footage shot by a jihadist propagandist would hypothetically be interchangeable

is a somewhat surprising one, but, even if it were true, it ignores, of course, the fact that any footage posted has also been *edited* by propagandists. We do not know what footage the professional would have returned with because we do not know how closely the propagandist's work matches what actually happened – that is part of what makes it propaganda.

The famous film *Triumph of the Will*, made by “Hitler’s film director” Leni Riefenstahl to document the 1936 Nazi party Congress, was so powerful that arrangements were made by the party to have it seen throughout the country. In fact, after the Germans took Austria, arrangements were made to have it seen by that population as well. Riefenstahl’s technique was so innovative that approaches she introduced are still in use by directors such as Steven Spielberg today: for example, having her subjects stationary while cameras moved on dollies. But the film is studied today as a powerful example of propaganda, not *documentary* film making, and it would hardly be cited as a definitive source for all that did or did not happen in Nuremburg during the relevant time period.⁹²

Consider the powerful impact footage can have when it is edited in a particular way compared to how footage of the exact same event would have appeared if it had been edited differently, such as placing the shot in a broader context and thus sharply diluting its force – and therefore its usefulness to the group.

As video, by its very nature, offers only a partial, selective view of reality, this allowed Hezbollah to focus on specific incidents within an operation, allotting them a significance way beyond their actual battlefield worth. The video camera allowed Hezbollah, which attached great value to symbolic gestures, to highlight such deeds, transforming them into the objective of the operation. Thus, when, in the autumn of 1994, a Hezbollah unit

infiltrated the Israeli *Dla'at* military compound in Lebanon and managed, at one point, to raise the organization's flag, the unit's cameraman focused almost exclusively on this event. Having captured this triumphant scene on video, Hezbollah then broadcast it countless times, turning it in effect into the whole point of the operation. That the Israelis ultimately drove Hezbollah guerrillas from the outpost counted for little against the symbolic achievement of raising a flag in an Israeli military post and was ignored.⁹³

It is extremely doubtful that a network cameraman on the scene would have photographed the scene the same way *or* produced a comparable news piece after editing whatever footage had been shot on the overall operation.

Ms. Logan is quite specific in terms of what would have to be done before any material from an insurgent website could be considered sufficiently confirmed to be judged usable in one of her reports, but Ms. Logan is also widely judged one of the best journalists to have reported from Iraq. As a result, her use of these websites may be serving to legitimize a practice based on what is visible on the surface, when the work that went into her feeling comfortable about using the footage remains behind the scenes and therefore invisible.⁹⁴

I have heard concerns expressed that in at least some instances reporters are not even confirming that the footage they are using matches the attack they are reporting on, and I am aware of at least one case where I know that to be true.⁹⁵ In another case, a video posted to the web ends with a spectacular explosion when, in fact, the Stryker vehicle that was hit was later towed away and repaired, and the entire crew survived with only minor injuries.⁹⁶ I do not know that this footage was ever aired by a network, but I raise the example to make clear the dangers of relying on insurgent editors.

At a more basic level, an assumption that images do not reflect a particular point of view is simply unsupportable. Images are texts without words and are therefore more difficult to analyze because they are nonlinear.⁹⁷ CNN's own expert analyst for the sniper story, for example, made clear that the sniper videos were filmed in a particular way precisely to maximize their emotional impact:

TUCHMAN (voice-over): The first thing the sergeant notices is that, in his opinion, the sniper's gunshot is coming from a place and an angle that is different from the cameraman's location.

COUGHLIN: Just because of the angle where the shot comes from and from the camera view.

TUCHMAN: Coughlin says, this shows the sniper team is trying to maximize publicity opportunities.

COUGHLIN: It tells me that their shooter is farther away than the cameraman is. The cameraman gets up close, so he can actually get a good video of it, but you don't need to be that close to be able to shoot like that.⁹⁸

Images, whether moving or still, make arguments, and these videos, particularly when shown as a group as CNN showed them, are a perfect example of how arguments are expressed visually (keeping in mind that images are always contextualized by the words that accompany them, whether captions for still photographs or the reporter's voice-over for news footage.) Taking the CNN sniper tapes as an example, they first and foremost make the argument that the insurgents use snipers because they are a precision weapon, and the insurgents are profoundly concerned that they not cause civilian casualties. This is made clear in the translation provided by the CNN reporter/narrator, as he translates the soundtrack.

Michael Ware: "People are around them," warns the sniper's spotter, who seems to be operating the video camera.

"Want me to find another place?"

"No, no," comes the reply. "Give me a moment."⁹⁹

Later, the same reporter notes:

Here, the spotter warns the shooter he only sees Iraqis, until he's sure he's identified an American."¹⁰⁰

Notice that what is happening here is that the insurgents have used the tapes to make an argument about themselves, and CNN passes the argument on uncritically, without comment or critique. Yet, in fact, nothing could be further from the truth. These groups all employ the tactic of using suicide bombers to generate spectacular media events, (certainly this particular group, the Islamic Army of Iraq, has, and has been cited as "nearly as violent as Zarqawi's al-Qaeda in Iraq."¹⁰¹ They are also, remember, the group that claimed responsibility for murdering in cold blood the sole survivor of that Bulgarian helicopter—and filming the act.) The surest way to make a bombing spectacular enough to attract media attention is to cause as many casualties as possible.¹⁰² After all, on a typical news day, a typical suicide bombing may or may not be singled out on the nightly news for something more than a quick mention. And there is never a guarantee that the visuals for any particular suicide bombing will make it onto the nightly news on any given evening.¹⁰³ Notice that the prior practices of the group that provided the tapes, their percentages of sniper attacks versus bombings, are not treated as relevant to the story in any event: for CNN these

tapes are taken as evidence of representative practice *across* the insurgency. *This* group provides tapes only of sniper attacks, *they* are on tape talking about their desire to avoid civilian casualties, let's discuss, not this individual group—which may or may not be that dominant in the galaxy of Iraqi groups, a question not addressed in detail—but practices across the insurgency *as if* these tapes were representative of their practice and *as if* their practice were representative of the entire insurgency, without any explicit discussion of either of those two assumptions.¹⁰⁴

Obviously, not every act of terrorism is targeted to the American audience, and those groups who are concerned with other audiences will not care all that much about what degree of violence is required to gain the attention of the American press. But the simple fact that these videos were sent to CNN and not al Jazeera makes clear that *this* group did care about the American audience. The only way to ensure that a suicide bombing will be covered by the American press—which is to say the only way to ensure that it will be covered in detail, rather than merely mentioned—is to ratchet up the number of casualties, unless the target is particularly symbolic or uniquely shocking. It is the bombings that have produced spectacular numbers of deaths that have received serious amounts of attention. And the only way to cause large numbers of casualties is to attack “soft”—meaning civilian—targets. And that is exactly what has been done, over and over again.

So why would it matter to this particular group to be seen by an American audience as taking particular care to *avoid* civilian casualties? It is far more than simply a statement about their not being responsible for civilian deaths. That alone might matter for an Arab audience, but these tapes, after all, were sent to

CNN, not al Jazeera. More than that, if they strive to avoid civilian casualties, that suggests that they are a military organization, or operating as one. After all, it is militaries that target one another's personnel while trying to avoid civilian casualties. Creating such a perception of themselves would simultaneously identify this group as the equivalent of the U.S. military, and therefore legitimate – which is to say, not terrorist. This is the central message of the tapes, the ultimate reason for wanting them seen by an American audience: *we are not terrorists, we are just another military force*. This is particularly important in context, since, according to the story, the group is reaching out at this time in part because they want to engage the United States in negotiations. But the United States, which might negotiate with an insurgent or militia group, would not negotiate with terrorists.

That still leaves them as a threat to American forces. To be sure, virtually every night the number of U.S. casualties has been mentioned on the nightly news, reported on cable every day, and in the papers every morning – on print and online. During those periods when the amount of Iraq coverage dipped, which happened on a regular basis long before the success of the “surge,”¹⁰⁵ the one thing the networks always felt obligated to mention was U.S. casualties. That is often all that is reported – the number of troops killed, perhaps where they died, and sometimes the weapon that killed them. As a typical example, on April 17, 2005, Dan Harris on ABC reported that, “Insurgents in Iraq this weekend killed three US soldiers and also an American humanitarian worker. . . . The three soldiers were killed and seven others wounded when mortars hit a marine base near Ramadi. Witnesses say insurgents also tried to infiltrate that camp.”¹⁰⁶ (A story on the aid worker, identified by name, followed immediately.)¹⁰⁷

And no doubt that mattered to all these groups; it was helpful to them to the extent that it contributed to a weakening of American support for continuing the fight.¹⁰⁸

The second argument made by the tapes sent to CNN, of course, is that the enemy can reach any American soldier, anywhere, anytime. It is an implicit argument expressed visually, but that does not make it any less powerful. Indeed, it makes it *more* powerful because it remains unexpressed, and therefore difficult to confront head on. CNN's somewhat lukewarm qualifiers "[t]here is no way to know everything about the sniper threat from a single propaganda tape"¹⁰⁹ can never trump the power of these visuals particularly as they are contradicted by the thrust of the overall story.¹¹⁰

Finally, they argue that *this* is the threat our soldiers face, since each of the videos is of snipers killing (or apparently killing) soldiers; no other type of attack is represented in the set.¹¹¹ In fact, CNN's reporters make the sniper threat appear to be as great as they can:

Anderson Cooper: Michael, how often are—are these—these snipers firing? How often are—are U.S. troops getting killed by snipers?

WARE: well, Anderson, they're constantly out there. There is [sic] insurgent sniper teams operating across the country, you could say with some confidence, every single day of the week.

The question as to how effective they are and whether there's been an increase in these particular type of sniper attacks, most pointedly here in Baghdad, is a matter of great question at the moment. The U.S. military is not discussing it, citing the safety of their troops, saying: We don't want to let the enemy know whether their tactics are working or not.

So, just how many American troops are being hurt by this is a closely guarded secret – Anderson.

COOPER: When you see it through – through their video cameras, you see how vulnerable U.S. troops are. I mean, you have been out there embedded. You have been targeted by snipers. Are those tactics pretty common?

WARE: Very much so. It's been a feature of this war, Anderson, since the beginning. I mean, there was an insurgent sniper in the northern city of Tal Afar at the end of last year who was extremely patient, who would sit for hours and hours and hours, waiting for an American soldier in a tank to shift just that little bit to find the narrow gap that he could shoot between the soldier's body armor, the plates in his body armor. At that time, there was a Navy SEAL sniper team hunting him. And they believe that he had received his training in Syria. So, this is throughout the country, Anderson. And American troops face it every single day.¹¹²

But every one of these arguments is, in fact, misleading, if not wholly inaccurate.

At least publicly, CNN argues that the group sent the video with the sniper images to lend credibility to the second video they sent, the one where the group's leader answered questions.

We are assuming they included the sniper tape to prove the authenticity of the Al-Shimary interview tape and to establish their credibility. Of course, we also understood that some might conclude there is a public relations benefit for the insurgents if we aired the material, especially on CNN International.¹¹³

That is implausible. The visual images would be far more important to an insurgent group – which became the basis for CNN's story? The tape of a single man, his face electronically obscured, answering questions

in Arabic would be intended to lend credibility to the sniper images, to validate them so they would appear credible enough to justify the on-air attention CNN proceeds to give them.

But the confusion over which tape would likely be the more important to this group is of a piece with CNN's general confusion over the role images and, indeed, the media itself, play within the logic of terrorism. There is no reason, however, to believe that CNN is any different in this from any other mainstream media outlet. Willfully or not, CNN does not understand the role the press plays in this war, and because they do not—or, perhaps, simply do not care—they continue to play that role quite effectively.

On the air the night after the story aired, Anderson Cooper said, "even if there weren't a single camera around to record it, insurgents would go on shooting Americans. They are the enemy, and that's what they do."¹¹⁴ What Cooper fails to understand is, unlike previous wars, that there aren't cameras around *belonging to Western press organizations* doesn't matter. There is no kind of forced choice for those who would want to kill Americans—kill them in front of Western cameras or kill them without the event being recorded for an American audience? Because, of course, there *aren't* any press cameras around to record what is happening for the most part. If there were, CNN would be airing footage professionally shot by its own people, not badly focused black-and-white footage mailed in by the same people shooting the guns as well as shooting the pictures. The insurgents have simply adapted to the lack of Western cameras by providing their *own* cameras, since the American press has proven so willing to air their footage. The sniper videos *themselves* deny Cooper's statement. The enemy will not stop killing American soldiers when Western

cameras aren't around, to be sure, instead *they'll simply provide their own cameras*, and provide the footage to the American networks *for* the American networks, because in the end, from their perspective, there is no difference whatsoever. Indeed, if anything, they end up *better off*, since the footage being aired has been shot (and edited) to reflect their point of view. It is better for their cause if the networks depend upon and use the footage provided than using footage shot by (and edited by) professional photojournalists. Cooper's statement is, in the end, a nonsensical one, at least for a war being fought against enemies using the methodologies of terrorism.

The footage being integrated into news pieces more typically has also been footage of American soldiers and marines being killed and maimed. The only reason this is found acceptable with less controversy than met the CNN piece, or perhaps is simply not noticed in the same way, is because it is generally presented as footage of a convoy being attacked, or a truck or "humvee" or armored personnel carrier being destroyed—the language reporters use almost always camouflages what is being shown, as if somehow these pieces of machinery shown being blown up were moving down the road under their own control. The use of this footage has become so normalized at this point that the audience does not have to think about what they are seeing, whereas when a network airs footage of the death of an American soldier out in the open and visible, there is no avoiding what is being shown, and the response is therefore enormously negative.¹¹⁵ But the networks are attempting to make a distinction in the use of this footage between what is being *watched* and what is being *seen* that cannot be sustained.¹¹⁶

The fact that American television coverage is "sanitized" in this fashion, that bodies (at least

American bodies) are not shown, has been noted before by a variety of critics and scholars.¹¹⁷ For this reluctance to show the human body *in extremis* to be trumped, a particular image must be judged to be extraordinarily newsworthy, and, even then, there is tremendous sensitivity in the way a particular image is displayed. This sensitivity is present in both broadcast and print news outlets. So, for example, the images of American soldiers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu were judged so newsworthy that they were widely used by American newspapers, but almost never on the front page.¹¹⁸ One of Ms. Logan's own pieces was shunted to the CBS website, but was not aired on the nightly news, apparently because it was not judged newsworthy enough to overcome the degree of graphic-ness in the story.¹¹⁹ The image of the bodies of four American contractors killed in Fallujah, their bodies mutilated and hung from a bridge, was used by all three broadcast networks and a wide variety of newspapers—but such a broad range of decisions was made about how to alter the image to make it “acceptable,” through cropping or pixellating,¹²⁰ (which was not the case for the Mogadishu pictures) that very few Americans saw the image as it was originally taken. As a result, unlike previous iconic images, so many versions were seen that there is not a single immediately recognizable image that will stand the test of time. People remember the story, but it is doubtful they will recognize the image because people saw the image in so many different forms.¹²¹

Some have argued that this is some kind of ideological choice made to sanitize war itself and make it more acceptable. But, in fact, the American news system sanitizes every type of story that involves bodies. That included the coverage of September 11,

2001 (9/11), particularly compared to that seen in other countries,¹²² so that, for example, almost no images were shown of those jumping from the Towers—and when those few were shown, the shots were intentionally shown from an extreme distance, to make sure almost no details were visible—and essentially none at all of those burned or killed in the Pentagon.¹²³ If these choices were ideological and cut in a pro-war direction as has been suggested, one would have expected the coverage of 9/11 to have been less sanitized, not more, in an effort to soften the American public's attitudes, to make them more likely to accept war in response to the attack. Certainly, one would expect the footage of the second plane hitting the second Tower to continue to be seen—it is, after all, at that moment when it is clear that this is an *attack*, an act of moral agency. Yet that footage has essentially gone down the memory hole, as all six networks have policies making it all but impossible for reporters to use it for fear that it will “upset” viewers. At this point, it is rarely even seen during coverage of the 9/11 anniversaries. As a result, the iconic 9/11 imagery is now difficult to distinguish from that of any other generic disaster. Even when the footage is used, it is inevitably cut just before the plane actually impacts the building.¹²⁴

The larger point is that this treatment of the body in news coverage extends far beyond war. Car crashes are a staple of local television news, but the images that accompany such stories in every media market in the country, on every network's affiliates, are images of proxies of death rather than images of death itself. Thus one will see shoes in the road, teddy bears by the side of the road, crumpled cars, perhaps the shape of a covered body, but *never* an actual body, much less a body part. A Boston paper was judged by its readers to have used an image of a woman shot during a riot

on its front page which was too graphic. It received so much criticism from them that it had to offer an apology to them and to the woman's family. The *Boston Herald's* Editorial Director was quoted as saying it "was never our intent to disrespect Victoria Snelgrove or her family. . . . In retrospect, the images of this unusually ugly incident were too graphic. I apologize to the Snelgroves and the community at large."¹²⁵

By the same token, there are a range of iconic images associated with the crashes of civilian airliners. The pieces of the wreck itself, off in the distance, with rescue teams in hazmat suits moving among it, perhaps the shape of bodies in aligned body bags, above all the front piece of the plane, crumpled and lying on its side, are all iconic images associated with such crashes, but, again, bodies and body parts will simply not be shown on American television, nor will they appear in the print press, and certainly not in shots showing great detail, in close-up, nor shots where the body might be identifiable by family or friends. The images from the Lockerbie disaster when a civilian airliner was brought down by a bomb on board match up almost identically with the images from every other air disaster when planes were brought down by weather, mechanical failure, or pilot error. There is no recognizable difference. (In fact, when covering Lockerbie, photographers were very consciously making decisions to *not* photograph bodies except from a distance.¹²⁶) The news sanitizes war in the United States, in other words, because the news sanitizes *everything*.¹²⁷

What is ironic is that research suggests that presenting what is happening in Iraq as less gory than it actually is may well work in a fashion that is not *pro-war*, but rather in a way that may be *pro-terrorist* or at least which works to the terrorist's advantage.¹²⁸ And the way the duck blind footage is used suggests

how. Limiting themselves to what appear to be sterile explosions destroying vehicles and vehicles only, the networks shy away from any footage that might be available of suicide bombs, because unlike the IEDs, which are used against Americans in their vehicles, the suicide bomb, the other signature weapon of this war, is not typically used against military convoys but against “soft” targets – which is to say against groups of unprotected civilians out in the open. Showing footage of suicide bombers as they detonate would involve, not sterile images of metal hulks exploding, the bodies inside hidden from view, but raw images of body parts flying, and there would be little way to disguise that reality – by the time outlets were done cropping or pixellating, there would be nothing left of the image. And that would mean showing the American public the essential nature of the enemy being fought in this war. Thus while we see the IEDs *as* they explode, we only see the *aftermath* of the suicide attack, after things have been relatively cleaned up – the burning hulk of the vehicle, crying relatives, distraught or angry crowds, perhaps discretely covered bodies, both of the dead and of the wounded being rushed away. Perhaps that might seem bad enough, but often, on nights when the networks were covering the Iraq war in only the most abbreviated fashion – what reporters refer to as “the police blotter,” the run down of the day’s carnage – we did not necessarily see the crowds, the relatives, the bodies, and the wounded. We saw only the visual cliché of the burnt out or still burning vehicle.

Would a change in network standards, so that night after night the American television audience had seen suicide bombers detonating in the midst of crowds of civilians, including large numbers of women and children, in market places, in front of hospitals, in all the other obviously nonmilitary locations the bombers

have sought, and continue to seek out, have made those audiences more insistent that American troops be pulled out more rapidly? Or would it have given them a compelling, perhaps irrefutable argument for why these enemies had to be defeated at all costs?

Consider, by the same token, a story that may well have rallied public support strongly for the American military deployment in Iraq had more been made of it. The initial search for two missing American servicemen was closely followed by the press, indeed served to temporarily spike Iraq coverage quite obviously. Yet although the story of the search received a great deal of coverage, the second story, a short time later, which tragically brought closure to the first with the discovery of the soldier's bodies received almost no attention. The condition of the bodies was such—because the men had been tortured before their deaths and their bodies mutilated afterwards—that no visuals were possible, whereas the first story, the search, offered multiple opportunities for visuals as troops spread out across the area looking for their lost comrades, and as cartoon simulations portrayed the soldier's capture. And the press responded as if without visuals, there was no story. When the terrorist group responsible later released a propaganda video of their deaths, that too was barely even a 1-day story because, again, visuals were impossible. As Lee Cowan said on the *CBS Morning News*:

The video, issued by the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq begins with an ode to Osama bin Laden, saying the killings of the US soldiers near Yusufiyah last month were, quote, "revenge for our sister who was dishonored by a soldier." What comes next is as impossible to imagine as it is impossible to show.¹²⁹

CBS appears to have not even covered the release

of the video on their nightly news show. NBC's reporter said, "The Website contained videos showing two mutilated corpses. NBC News will not show it because of its gruesome nature."¹³⁰ They, too, only reported the video one time during their morning news show. There is no indication ABC covered the story at all. So the fact that these soldiers had not only been tortured and killed, but that their deaths had been turned into a propaganda tool, could easily have been missed entirely by the American public. It would be easy, given the amount of coverage, for someone who followed the news even fairly carefully to believe that they were missing still, and hence to be unaware of what the enemy had done to these two men.

Is it possible the public reaction would have been a widespread revulsion, and a determination that the military should be pulled out immediately, rather than be exposed to such dangers? Yes, but it seems more likely that a rhetorical appeal based on the theme that "no one does this to our boys" would have been successful.¹³¹

Other Videos, Other Images – Different Choices.

It should be emphasized that the near taboo regarding the showing of dead bodies is a *near* taboo, not an absolute one. Obviously there have been quite dramatic images regularly transmitted from the war in Iraq that involve the human body *in extremis*, in particular many images of large numbers of dead Iraqis. But the graphic nature of these photographs comes from the shock of the number of bodies, not from the state the bodies are in. Most of these images involve victims of militias or death squads, and while the victims have been shot at close range, their hands bound behind them, the images are not particularly

gory. The images of those killed in the town of Haditha, whose deaths were themselves the point of controversy, were always displayed, for example, wrapped in blankets (just like the victims of American car crashes), shocking in number, ambiguous in presentation. While we hear that large numbers of bodies have turned up after having been beheaded, tortured, or mutilated, and the descriptions of the state those bodies are in is often quite graphic in the print press, those are not images we are likely to *see* in the American press anytime soon. No matter how graphic the *description* in the story, those descriptions have not been—and I predict, will not be—accompanied by pictures of any bodies that have been obviously decapitated, where the marks from the electric drill used as a torture device are visible, nor will a mainstream media outlet any day soon publish a picture of a corpse whose eyes have been gouged out, despite the fact that reports of such corpses have appeared in these outlets on a regular basis. Even the photographs from abu Ghraib, although they were published and displayed in the American media repeatedly, were the same small set from a much larger collection simply being shown over and over again. The reason is that the vast majority of those images were too graphic to pass the fairly narrow parameters of what is considered acceptable by the American press.

The kinds of dilemmas confronted by the press when making decisions about which images to publish and how to use them, particularly in the case of hostage situations, were made especially clear in the case of Nicholas Berg. Berg, a young entrepreneur seeking his fortune in Iraq, was the first American whose beheading was videotaped¹³² and made available worldwide via the Internet by Zarqawi's group (many believing

he himself wielded the knife.)

No legitimate news organization was about to air the snuff film, but that did not mean news outlets were not facing agonizing choices. The decision to not air the *entire* video did not mean that it was not either necessary or appropriate to air *some* images from the video. Which images, then, should be aired? Networks confronted the additional choice of whether to air those images as moving images, as footage, or as stills “frame grabbed” from the video, while print outlets had to decide how prominently to display whichever images they chose to use. Often whether images are used on the front page or not does not reflect a newspaper’s assessment of how important the story the image is associated with it is, but their assessment of how graphic the particular image is. The belief is that those who produce the paper have no way of knowing who will pick the paper up in the morning, and an understanding that many read it at the breakfast table. Putting a particularly graphic image on the front page would therefore mean confronting their readers – and perhaps their reader’s young children – with it without providing fair warning. They will tend, therefore, to put such images on the inside of the paper, “teasing” such an image, if it reflects an important story, on the front page. (That is what happened, for example, with the Mogadishu images in most cases.) Today, of course, both print and broadcast outlets face the additional question: Should they provide on their websites hyperlinks to websites that do provide such a video in its entirety for their audience to permit them to view it if they so desire?

It is when hostage videos are released by kidnappers that it can become most transparent that the media are serving as a direct conduit for the terrorist or insurgent message—not, that is, for the substance

of the information they wish to convey, but for the actual, original message as they constructed, designed, and staged it. There is as wide a difference as can be imagined in seeing or hearing the words, “today the kidnappers released a video in which the victim can clearly be seen and heard begging for his life,” coming from a reporter who is attempting to accurately distill, describe, and explain what is on a tape, and actually seeing some poor man or woman doing just that. And there is little question that it benefits the terrorist or insurgent group more to have the public view the emotional spectacle than to merely read or hear about it second hand.

To be sure, there seems little question that these videos are newsworthy material, and that there is a basis for the choice the news networks made, early on, to air at least a few seconds of them. That does not mean, however, that the choice to do so was an inevitable or self-evident one, or that it was the choice that best served their viewers or that other considerations should not have outweighed whatever led them to use cuts from these videos. Certainly choices regarding how much to use from some of these videos were hotly debated, both before and after they were aired.

This was seen most dramatically when the tape of Nicholas Berg’s beheading was released. The beheading videos, of which there were a number, are themselves part of a sub-set of hostage videos in which the hostage is executed on camera (and as the beheadings-for-camera seemed to taper off, perhaps for fear that the raw savagery displayed was hurting the very movement producing them,¹³³ other forms of executions began to take their place). The Berg video was the first, and as discussed above, what gave the American media such pause in that case was the systemic taboo within American newsrooms over showing the human body

in extremis. That attitude is balanced against the news value of the given image, and while there was never a chance that the actual execution would be aired, (since it is literally impossible to imagine a news value that would justify using that image to producers—or convince them that their audiences would accept such an image being aired), it left open the question of what precisely would be shown. And yet all the networks opted for almost precisely the same image, give or take an additional second of footage.

NBC Nightly News and *ABC's World News Tonight* stopped the tape just as the killer drew his knife, while *The CBS Evening News* went a bit further, showing the killer grab Berg by his hair, slam him to the ground and put the knife to his neck. "I just think you really need to let people see as much as they can in a judicious way," *CBS Evening News* producer Jim Murphy said after the broadcast. "By showing even that little bit, you got a better sense of what some very bad people are willing to do to Americans." Both MSNBC and CNN stopped short of showing the knife being brandished. But Fox News—after not showing it throughout the day—did so by Tuesday night.¹³⁴

Hostage videos come in a well-defined sequence, and although it is certainly possible for any or several steps in the sequence to be missing, and it is also possible for multiple videos to appear at several of these steps. The point is that videos will not be released out of order. First will come a video to prove that a particular group does indeed hold a particular victim. It is video that is used to establish the validity of the claim that hostages are being held. Thus, for example:

Good morning, Gretchen. Well, this appears to be the first confirmation of the hostage taking. The men were kidnapped at dawn last Thursday from a house here in Baghdad.

The video, aired on the Arab news channel Al-Jazeera, is frightening for what it shows—the three men at gunpoint—and for what it demands. The hostage takers say Americans Jack Hensley and Eugene “Jack” Armstrong and Briton Kenneth Bigley will be executed within 48 hours if women in two Iraqi prisons are not released. The three worked for an Arab construction company.¹³⁵

Then will come a video or group of videos in which a group’s demands are made, and its demands are linked to threats to the hostages. Obviously, as this example shows, steps can sometimes be compressed. And then comes the execution tape.

Why go to the extra trouble of filming these executions? Once the victim’s bodies are found, we know they have been killed—as well as the method of their execution. Why take the risk, even if it is a minimal risk, that such a tape might provide any worthwhile intelligence information to the other side?

The answer is that these tapes are of enormous value to the groups who make them. They are of value for recruiting, they are of value in rallying those who already support the cause (particularly donors), and they are valuable insofar as they have the potential to demoralize the other side. It is noteworthy that for quite some time bodies were found in Baghdad day after day with no tapes being released of these poor souls’ executions. In those cases, the bodies themselves “embodied” the message of intimidation that was being sent. It is when *foreigners* have been killed that tapes have been made.¹³⁶

Why are they using the Internet? Because the real battle here is for American opinion. Al-Qaeda’s aim is to break America’s will to stay in Iraq. And it knows that by killing

one American and filming and putting it on the Internet, there is more impact than a hundred hit and run attacks on American convoys.¹³⁷

Put another way,

The nightmare video of an American civilian captured in Iraq being decapitated by his captors was anything but a random act of terrorism, experts say—it was a press release, carefully designed for a global audience.¹³⁸

But because of the sensitivity about what is shown of a graphic nature, there is no real difference between the distinct categories of video in terms of what is actually seen by American audiences: the initial video looks little different from the videos in which demands and threats are made, which look little different from the execution videos. All that we see of any of them is a Westerner, possibly in an orange jumpsuit, possibly heard begging for his life. We know that these tapes are different only because the reporter tells us so. But consider the power of listening to the quotes from these hostages, and consider the emotions that they elicit, when no other footage is seen or shown.

On September 29, 2004, the group holding British subject Kenneth Bigley released a video of him begging Tony Blair for his life (in other words begging the Prime Minister to meet the kidnapper's demands so that he would be released.) This was after the two Americans taken with him already had been beheaded. ABC showed two cuts from the video, first showing Bigley saying,

My life is cheap. He [Tony Blair] doesn't care about me.

They then showed Bigley saying,

They don't want to kill me. They could have killed me a week, two, three weeks ago. Whenever. All they want is their sisters out of prison.

That cut was introduced by the reporter's somewhat odd comment that:

Bigley asked for compassion on both sides.

The video as a whole was described this way:

The video shows Ken Bigley held in a cage, chained at the neck, hands and feet. Did they mean to evoke an image of Abu Ghraib prison?¹³⁹

Thus Bigley is shown appealing *not* to the terrorists, those actually holding his life in their hands, but to Tony Blair, and is further shown stating that they obviously don't want to kill him, since they have not done so as of yet. The reporter then suggests an equivalence between the terrorists and Tony Blair, since both have the ability to be compassionate, the implication being that Tony Blair has as much control over the situation as the men actually holding the knife to Bigley's throat – which is certainly the argument the terrorists would make.

That which would lead the viewer to anger *against the terrorists* most directly is precisely that which is not shown. There is no dark conspiracy afoot here: the shots that would arouse anger most clearly and sharply are so graphic and grotesque that it is difficult to imagine any network news producer or newspaper editor choosing to use them. Indeed, the one time a shot of a severed American head was used, (to my knowledge), the circumstances were somewhat exceptional.¹⁴⁰

The argument made by the networks is that showing the beginning of the tape shows an audience more than enough to permit their own imaginations to fill in any necessary blanks.

"I don't think anybody in our audience failed to understand what happened to Nick Berg," said ABC News spokesman Jeffrey Schneider, whose network described Berg's murder but did not show it. "I don't think anybody watching [World News Tonight] could fail to understand the brutality and violence of what was perpetrated. Therefore, we feel we did our jobs the way we were supposed to."¹⁴¹

But would it generate the kind of anger a powerful image will?

"If you turn America's stomach, you turn around public support at the same time," Felling said. "All the news reporting, all the language, all the written word in the world does not have the effect of one brutal video image."¹⁴²

And when anger is subtracted, what is left? What is going to be felt, watching someone wearing an orange jumpsuit begging helplessly for their life? Remember, Bigley was not begging *the terrorists holding him* for his life, he was begging *Tony Blair*. How do we feel, hearing these poor men blame our leaders, even suspecting that their statements are under extreme and extraordinary duress?

To answer that, it is necessary to first go back and explain the symbolism behind the orange jumpsuits themselves. Obviously they are the omnipresent symbol of the detention center at Guantanamo, but leaving it there is too simple. When the very first detainees arrived in Cuba, a picture circulated around the world of them in transit to their cells, immediately after having been taken off the plane. They were in a narrow, outdoor corridor, chained off, in two rows, each row of men facing out, hands bound behind their

backs, kneeling, with some sort of goggles covering their eyes. The picture made waves—indeed, the very fact that their eyes were covered in such a manner was labeled as torture in some circles¹⁴³—and was so controversial that it was raised in a press briefing with then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. And since that was the first time the men were seen, it was, of course, the first time they were seen in orange jumpsuits.

By the 10th day after the first men had arrived at Guantanamo, the press frenzy had reached such a fever pitch that Rumsfeld held an unusual briefing in which the only topic was the detainees and their treatment, and he promised to stay as long as there were questions to answer. It was then that the subject of the now-infamous image was raised:

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, since you want to clear the air about the detainees, one of the things that have aroused public opinion and the parliamentarians in Britain is this photograph that shows the detainees kneeling with their hands tied behind their back. Can you just explain that—

RUMSFELD: I will, to the best of my ability. It's probably unfortunate that it was released. It's the tension between wanting to meet the desires of the press to know more and the public to know more, and what that was, I'm told, is not a detention area. That is a corridor or a walkthrough area that came—my understanding is something like this. When they're on the airplane, they wear earpieces because of the noise. You've ridden on these planes. They're combat aircraft. And we've all worn earpieces. It's no big deal.

There were a number who had tested—that were worried about tuberculosis. So in a number of instances, they were given masks for the protection of other detainees and for the protection of the guards. They come out of an airplane, and their back lowers, and they walk out.

RUMSFELD: And then they loaded them into, I believe, buses, and they took them down to a ferry, and they were still restrained—their hands and their feet restrained because of the dangers that occur during a period of movement. They put them on a ferry, if I'm not mistaken, and the ferry takes them across to the other side of the Guantanamo Bay.

They get off of the ferry and into a vehicle that then transports them to the detention center. They get out of that vehicle and in relatively small numbers are moved into this corridor that is a fenced area, and they are asked to get down on the ground. They get down on the ground, and they take off their ear pieces. They take off their masks. They do whatever they do with them before taking them in small numbers into the cells where they then would be located, at which point they are no longer in transit and, therefore, they are no longer restrained the way they were.

What happened was, someone took a picture and released it apparently, of them in that corridor kneeling down while their headpieces are being taken off and people drew a whole lot of conclusions about how terrible that was, that they're being held in that corridor.

Now, you know, if you want to think the worst about things, you can. If people want to ask questions and find out what is reasonably happening, it seemed to me not an unreasonable thing, when you're moving them from the vehicle they're in towards their cells to have them stop in some area prior to that and do what you do to get them in a circumstance that's more appropriate for being in a cell than how they were arranged in the buses, the ferries and the airplanes.

And I think you're quite right, I think that a lot of people saw that and said, "My goodness, they're being forced to kneel," which is not true.

QUESTION: You said it was unfortunate that that photograph was released. I would just argue that it was unfortunate that it wasn't released with more information.

RUMSFELD: Maybe. That's fair.

QUESTION: The lesson here ought not to be...

RUMSFELD: I mean, I'm not blaming anyone for releasing it, but...

QUESTION: ... less information or withholding photographs, but simply releasing more information...

RUMSFELD: Fair enough.¹⁴⁴

This picture was an ultimate visual representation that the terrorists being captured in Afghanistan were not just under our control but under our *submission*. In that sense, it was a visual inversion, coming years later, of Mogadishu, a message to the Islamic world that as you do to ours, so we shall do to yours (obviously this is in symbolic and not literal terms.)¹⁴⁵ Then, of course, there was the release of the images from the abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal, and in several of those photographs as well, prisoners are wearing orange jumpsuits (and if those images aren't about submission, then the word has no meaning.)

This matters because those responsible for the kidnapping and subsequent beheading of Nick Berg claimed that their action was a response to the abuse of prisoners at abu Ghraib. And the claim that the beheading was in revenge for abu Ghraib was noted by CBS, by NBC, and repeatedly by Fox and by CNN in their initial reporting. Since Berg, the association between the jumpsuit as seen on detainees held in the West and hostages held in Iraq is constantly

underscored and highlighted by the press. Whenever hostages appear in these videos wearing the jumpsuit, even when images from the videos are being shown to viewers, reporters make a point of drawing attention to that detail, and sometimes they go further, linking the detail to its origins. After a South Korean businessman was beheaded, CBS's Elizabeth Palmer noted, "Kim Sun-II's execution video, broadcast on the Arabic TV station Al-Jazeera, looks chillingly familiar. The captive, in an orange jumpsuit like the ones worn by Guantanamo prisoners and Iraqi detainees." (sic)¹⁴⁶ When Berg himself was killed, the *New York Times* reported that, "Mr. Berg appeared to be wearing an orange jump suit similar to those issued to Iraqis in American-run prisoners here. (sic)"¹⁴⁷ In point of fact, the claimed rationale was most likely false.

But most experts said they doubted Berg's videotaped death was a result only of those abuses. Several, noting that Berg apparently had been kidnapped nearly a month ago before he was killed, suggested that the prison scandal merely provided the terrorists with an opportunity to make a point.

"In the journalistic world, the prison photos provided the terrorists with a 'hook,'" said Matthew Felling, an analyst at the Center for Media and Public Affairs in Washington, DC.

The terrorists' real motives, the experts said, probably were more wide-ranging and more subtle than simple revenge.

One motive, said Juan Cole, a professor of Middle East history at the University of Michigan, is to frighten Americans, especially the nongovernmental groups and the population of some 25,000 civilian contractors—mainly security personnel—working in Iraq who provide a sizable armed "auxiliary" to the U.S. military and the Coalition Provisional Authority.

"The reason this video was made was an attempt to destroy that auxiliary," Cole said. "It's not going to scare the U.S. troops out of the country, and it's not going to get rid of the CPA. But there are a lot of (nongovernmental organizations) and contractors that are going to decide this is not the time to be doing business in Iraq."

Another goal, the experts said, is recruitment — drawing new members to the cause by portraying the killers as defenders against anti-Muslim forces.

"They are trying to tap into anti-American sentiment and use it to their own purposes . . . get more followers, get more cash, finding more political support," said Jim Walsh, an international security expert at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

A third, even more subtle motive might be a power struggle within the radical Islamist movement itself, Walsh speculated. The tape is entitled "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi shown slaughtering an American," and the Website that released the tape reportedly identified al-Zarqawi as Berg's killer.

U.S. investigators say al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian, has ties to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. By taking such a high profile, Walsh suggested, al-Zarqawi might be trying to establish himself as the active leader of the radical Islamist movement, leaving bin Laden in the shadows.¹⁴⁸

Yet few outlets explored the plausibility of the claim, and as time went on, any qualifier fell away from press reports so that the association became hardened: Nickolas Berg was beheaded because of the abuses at abu Ghraib at the very least, and perhaps for the perception of abuses at Guantanamo. In that context, the orange jumpsuit made sense.

Nicholas Berg, in other words, died for our sins, and the use of the jumpsuit was a visual method for making the point unmistakable and preparing it to

cross any language barriers. There were some people, after all, who accepted the claim that Berg was killed because prisoners had been abused, and even took his death as evidence for their arguments against the way detainees were being treated.¹⁴⁹

With no image from the end of the tape, without the final frame that reminded us that the blame for this unspeakable act—which could not be justified in any terms—rested squarely with those who had committed it, the appearance was created that this was in some sense if not a legitimate, then an understandable tit-for-tat. We had reaped as we had sown. Again, I am not arguing that this is what the networks were arguing. I am arguing that they used footage that made this argument in a subtle, powerful way—this is, after all, ultimately, propaganda material—without showing that part of the footage that puts the lie to that visual claim. In essence, they aired extremely effective propaganda material without doing any of the necessary work of unpacking or deconstructing it to make it less effective. Indeed, rather than explain how these tapes work to communicate the terrorist or insurgent message, rather than explain the strategy underlying the construction of these tapes as persuasive texts, the reporters in some cases did the work of the terrorists by explaining (and therefore magnifying) their message.

McGINNIS: Barry, what is the impact of this hostage-taking on stability in the region and the rebuilding effort?

PETERSEN: I think it's going to be very, very bad for any effort to rebuild this country. I think it's going to send a signal to foreign workers, American engineers, people who have the expertise that the rebuilding is going to take, that this is not a place to be. It's a very unsafe place. And even if the people want to go, you can imagine the

kind of family pressure they're going to be facing from loved ones who say, "Don't go to Iraq." Susan.¹⁵⁰

Furthermore, every time a victim was shown begging for their life and wearing the orange jumpsuit, a subtle legitimizing effect took place. Who wears these outfits? Detainees. And who takes detainees? Those with some authority and legitimacy. After all, *we hold detainees, we do not kidnap hostages*. Repetitively showing these hostages dressed this way, and furthermore usually going out of their way to draw attention to the way they were dressed, begging for their lives, but not showing the ultimate denouement captures a sense of shame and guilt, rather than a sense of anger and blame.

Given this real impact, consider Hoffman's argument about the danger of press coverage that over-emphasizes the personal, the individual anguish of specific families in the midst of a hostage crisis.¹⁵¹ In past crises, he argues, this has had the effect (sometimes intentional) of creating almost unbearable pressure on the government to violate long-standing U.S. policy and negotiate with terrorists. Because, after all, is not the most important thing to do whatever is necessary to bring our people home *now*, and end *these* families' concrete and visible suffering, and damn the consequences (for example, the possibility that more – and abstract – families might suffer in the future)?

When a video is released of Bigley pleading for his life, it provides an opportunity for precisely the type of situation Hoffman writes about: the pressure is put squarely on the government to void its policy of not negotiating with terrorists. How can they not move heaven and earth to bring their man home and end this specific family's anguish?

Mr. KENNETH BIGLEY (Hostage): I don't want to die. I don't deserve it. Please, please release the female prisoners that are held in Iraqi prisons. Please, please help me see my wife, who cannot, cannot go on without me. She really can't. And my son...

PETERSEN: And it was his son who pleaded as desperately to the kidnappers.

Mr. CRAIG BIGLEY (Hostage's Son): Be merciful, as we know you can be. Release Ken back to his wife and family. We ask you as a family to be all merciful.

PETERSEN: The kidnappers abducted Bigley and two Americans a week ago, and this week beheaded the Americans. As for letting Bigley make his plea, it fell not on deaf ears, but on the ears of a government that says it cannot negotiate with terrorists, even to save a life.

Mr. JACK STRAW (British Foreign Secretary): I'm afraid to say it can't alter the position of the British government. And as I've explained to the family, we can't get into a situation of bargaining with terrorists, because this would put many more people's lives at risk, not only in Iraq, but around the world.

PETERSEN: His wife, Sombat, issued her own plea saying, "As a loving wife, I beg you once more for mercy."¹⁵²

Peterson introduced this clip by saying that the kidnappers *allowed* Bigley to make this videotaped plea. This framing reflects a critical misunderstanding of the tape's purpose and importance: while it may have presented an opportunity for the hostage, he was conveying the *kidnappers'* message, not his own, under duress, and the message and images in the tape constitute a carefully constructed and extremely powerful propaganda text: to view it otherwise is to

seriously underestimate its power. In short, they did not *allow* it, they *demand*ed it.

It is extremely unlikely that a network would ever air *more* of a comparable tape, if another one were to be made available. But why not air less? Is it necessary that any of these tapes be aired for an audience to be informed? Indeed, this seems to be the direction that the networks were headed at the end of the spate of brutal executions of hostages in 2004. When Hensley was killed the next day, the video was mentioned by NBC, but no clips were aired. The question is, was the viewer ill-served when NBC subtracted the increment of information that could be gained from their watching him on the terrorist's video, as opposed to their simply hearing NBC's reporter say,

The report tonight on an Islamic Website claiming Jack Hensley, a contractor from Georgia, has been executed, the second American hostage killed in as many days.¹⁵³

CBS mentioned the second video but did no story about it and provided no quotes from it. In that case, on September 29, 2004, Dan Rather merely says,

For the second time in a week, Al-Jazeera television has aired a disturbing video of a Briton held hostage in Iraq.

This latest video shows Kenneth Bigley in a cage, chained and weeping, begging Prime Minister Tony Blair to save his life by meeting the demands of his Iraqi captors. Blair would say only that Britain will respond immediately if the militants make contact. So far, they have not.¹⁵⁴

One must again ask if the difference in what CBS's viewers learned on the two nights was so enormous as to justify the fact that on the first night CBS exposed their audience to the powerful manipulative effects

of enemy propaganda. Did they do so purposefully? Hardly. But they did do so without explaining that the material they were airing was designed and intended to manipulate, in part precisely by drawing powerfully on the viewer's emotions. Indeed, they made the situation worse by highlighting precisely those emotional appeals when they went to the family, who could hardly be expected to have anything in mind beyond their loved one's safety at that moment. In this way, CBS at least replays precisely that aspect of the earlier coverage of the TWA 847 hostage crisis of 1985 that brought the networks so much criticism.

When a tape was released threatening a kidnapped group of Christian Peacemakers, NBC only described the tape:

Kidnapped two months ago, the Christian activists included two Canadians, a Briton, and American Tom Fox. The video ran on Al Jazeera and appeared to be a week-old. The kidnappers threatened to kill the hostages, saying this is the last chance for the US to meet their demand to free thousands of Iraqi prisoners. That same threat was made in a video released last month. But two deadlines passed with no news.¹⁵⁵

CBS only quoted the video after the body was found:

I offer my plea to the people of America, not to the government of America, a plea for my release from captivity and also a plea for a release from captivity of all of the people of Iraq.¹⁵⁶

There was no other coverage: no stories prior; no mention of those earlier videos until Fox turned up dead. Was the simple description of the tape by NBC really a disservice to their audience?

If the practice of taking Western hostages, then passing on videos of them to the press (perhaps taking Western hostages in order to pass on such videos) has essentially ended in Iraq, there is no reason to believe the tactic will not be used again. It is well worth examining the tactic and its implications to take note of lessons learned, because there is every reason to believe it will be coming around again soon enough.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, asking why the various insurgent groups in Iraq stopped using Western hostages to gain media attention is a reasonable place for analysis to begin. Surely any number of factors was at play, but researchers should be asking whether one was that when networks stopped playing the tapes, taking Westerners hostage stopped being a way to gain access to the vast American audience.

It is interesting that toward the end of the use of the hostages as part of a media strategy, some of the most prominent victims were journalists.¹⁵⁸ A cynic might wonder whether the very real risk to the hostage attendant to giving these groups the amount and degree of air play they no doubt would have wanted was suddenly brought home in a way it had not been before. Certainly it is the case that the families of reporter-hostages were left alone and accorded a degree of respect that was never the case for the families of any other hostage, inevitably convinced, one way or the other, to appear on a couch on the *Today Show* and answer insipid questions about how they “felt” and “how hard” this must be for their family until the requisite tears appeared. Of course, once a question elicited tears, it was that question that would then be replayed over and over again on the cable networks, all day long.¹⁵⁹

At a minimum, whether or not there is a relationship between the end of the use of hostages as a media

strategy and the end of network use of hostage videos is both a productive question for future research and—until a definitive answer is determined—a good enough reason to keep any subsequent hostage material off network air, as a hedge.¹⁶⁰ If these groups believed the footage would not be used by the networks, that certainly does not *necessarily* mean such attacks would stop. This is propaganda footage, and there are multiple audiences for it, including their own followers, who view it over the Internet. It is also uploaded to the Internet for recruitment purposes. But it surely does not hurt for the terrorists to know that their footage will get a wider dissemination—to one of the audiences they care most about—than they could ever achieve on their own.

But the press seems to be an institution without any institutional memory. For them, a lesson learned but forgotten after TWA 847 was: don't let terrorists take control of network air. A corollary, although it was not phrased this way at the time, don't let terrorists air their propaganda material without comment or critique. For the modern era, it seems that a critical lesson ought be: Certainly don't let them do so without transparency.

What makes this all the more amazing is that in the 1980s, after some high profile decisions by networks covering terrorist events that were widely considered controversial or even of extremely questionable journalistic ethics, the networks agonized over how to handle their coverage of terrorist events. The coverage of the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 was widely denounced as "Terrorvision" and a "media circus," and many in the media conceded that their performance had been less than their finest hour.¹⁶¹ The hijacked plane was ultimately brought to Beirut. Once there, the hostages were split up, with some kept on the plane

and others distributed around the city to make a rescue impossible. Those in the city were then made available for interviews, in one particularly spectacular instance, in a press conference staged by the hijackers. The press negotiated with the hijackers for these interviews, and turned the press conference into a “circus,” despite the fact that the hostages were obviously under duress and not able to speak freely. And the hijacker’s allies in Beirut were frequently interviewed, executing a press strategy said to be designed by the graduates of the media departments of American universities. Few doubted that the American media were being openly and successfully manipulated.¹⁶² And since the hijackers and their allies in Beirut were working aggressively to favor broadcast and shut out print, this was primarily a question of the performance of television journalism.¹⁶³

There were also questions regarding the choices made by some journalists during the long Iran hostage crisis. Did that coverage do what was necessary to keep audiences as well informed as possible, or produce the best visuals? After all, it became well known – although, long after the fact, when it might have done some good – that those holding the American embassy in Tehran only actually walked the perimeter in protest with their placards when the cameras showed up (just as it was also only pointed out in retrospect that the protest signs were in English, not Farsi, and for a reason.) It was not until much later that it was made known that these “protesters” were in fact so industrious that they actually had two sets of signs. Knowing that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, (CBC), served a bilingual population, they would march carrying signs reading DEATH TO CARTER only until the cameramen signaled they had enough good footage, at

which point they would grab the signs reading MORT A CARTER, so that the same camera crew could get sufficient footage for their French-speaking audience as well.¹⁶⁴

Conclusions and Recommendations.

The problem for the Army, and the larger military of course, is that it has no way to enforce or even pass on lessons that should be learned by the press. Yet it remains the case that a war against terrorism, or, if you prefer, against terrorists, is by definition a war of wills and therefore a war against propaganda and images. While I would argue that in a time of war it is not necessary for the press to be neutral for them to perform all their expected roles (which is why local sports reporters are often the harshest critics of home town teams and coaches), that is a debate for another time. By disseminating enemy propaganda without comment or critique, the press is failing its responsibilities, including, in any event, any responsibility to be neutral, for the media do unwittingly facilitate the terrorist's purposes. A simple change in visual protocols, one already in use in other types of stories and therefore already available, would mean that the broadcast media could, if they insist on continuing the practice of using footage from the enemy of the enemy's attacks on American forces, at least properly contextualize that material for their audience. That level of transparency would seem to be the very least they owe.

The military can, and should, point this out, aggressively and regularly. PAOs at every level should complain when a story airs involving footage taken from insurgent websites – but should then say, if you're going to use this material, the least you can do

is present it with a disclaimer; it would be easy enough to do.

That said, the Army has to find ways to go around the press, to reach the American people in particular – and other audiences as well – directly, on the assumption that continuing to depend upon the media, and only the media, to get their message out will continue to be insufficient. The enemy has made today’s technologies work for them; the American military can and should do the same. This is *not* a question of propaganda, this would *not* be a violation of the Smith-Mundt Act (which is interpreted to forbid “progapandizing” the American people), this would be a simple continuation of the current public affairs obligations of every unit. The question is whether the military is currently able to fulfill those obligations effectively. If enemy propagandists are able to spread false information, and that information is being spread globally – in part through the American media – then the military’s public affairs obligations are not being fulfilled. Enemy propaganda and misinformation, whether textual or visual, have to be answered, whether they are being distributed to a foreign or domestic audience. No law can reasonably be interpreted as meaning the Army cannot correct lies being told to the American people by al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups.

If the truth is known, then military spokespeople need to be proactive, to engage in rapid response or, if at all possible, to get out ahead of stories that are predictable. To be sure, the military has gotten progressively better at this. When two soldiers were kidnapped in 2007, a massive search was underway for them in Iraq. Although the soldiers were not found during that initial search, insurgent video of their military ID cards was.¹⁶⁵

Rather than get out ahead of that story, the Army waited for the insurgent propaganda video to appear, and then attempted to respond. In fact, possession of the video meant that while the inevitability of the propaganda video's release was clear, the military had a huge advantage in terms of constructing a preemptive response. The choice to cede that advantage put the military, unnecessarily, in a reactive posture, when the military is already going to be in a reactive posture, unavoidably, all too often.

Yet a few years later, military PAOs were being far more aggressive in getting out ahead of what the insurgents were about to do in terms of propaganda, so that when, for example, a suicide bomber in Afghanistan killed several children along with a number of other civilians in December 2008, they were not allowed to shape and frame the narrative to their liking but were themselves forced into the reactive posture, when surveillance video of the bomber detonating in plain view of the children was released, thus proving that the murder of the children had not only occurred but was an intentional act—the bomber clearly saw the children and made the choice not to wait until they had left the area to detonate.

In this, the American military can take a lesson from the Israeli military. In 2006 the Israelis misunderstood the nature of the war they were fighting in Lebanon. As a result, they were quite literally fought to a standstill, not on the field of battle (and certainly not in the air) but on the *airwaves*, in the court of international public opinion. Ironically, international opinion began strongly on their side, with even Arab nations prepared to support their efforts against Hezbollah.¹⁶⁶ But Hezbollah was able to manipulate the press coverage carefully—and through the coverage, opinion—to

the point that the demands for Israel to halt military operations were ultimately insurmountable. Israel responded with detailed refutations of Hezbollah's charges—5 months later. Carefully documenting the way that airstrike after airstrike had been a response to Hezbollah rockets carefully hidden or placed among the civilian population may well have made an enormous difference in answering charges that Israel did not care about civilian casualties, was intentionally causing them, and was violating international law, if material had been released in real time. Five months after the fact was an after thought at best.

Although this was in a report actually provided by a private group (run by a retired officer in military intelligence), the very first footnote states that the "study was supported by Military Intelligence, the Operations Division of the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] General Staff, the IDF Spokesperson, and the legal experts of the IDF and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."¹⁶⁷ Its release was covered in the American press, but hardly as an item of vital importance in the moment.¹⁶⁸

Yet 2 years later, when Israel launched military operations against Gaza, visual product was made available to the press on a regular basis, so that Israel's claims about the nature of the targets they were hitting had some degree of visual support in a large amount of the American television coverage, at least. More than that, the same clips were released to the general public via Israel's own YouTube channel.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, an Israeli diplomat conducted what the *New York Times* believes to be the first-ever press conference on Twitter.¹⁷⁰ MNF-I has its own YouTube channel as well. But while soldiers, sailors, and marines are all producing interesting, riveting, even moving material, all posted daily to the various video sharing sites such

as YouTube,¹⁷¹ very rarely is new material pegged for subscribers to the official MNF-I channel, and what material does go up and what material is pegged is almost invariably dry and boring.¹⁷² When it is suggested that all units should take advantage of soldiers' familiarity with digital media and desire to record by designating someone to film every operation—if only to ensure there is a visual record to counter any lies told after the fact—this author has encountered serious resistance from military personnel, to include Public Affairs (PA) personnel. (Of course, there are some lessons the Israelis didn't learn. In 2006, they refused to permit Western journalists to accompany their ground forces, which meant reporters wishing to cover the situation on the ground in Lebanon—which was basically all of them—had no choice but to go in through the Hezbollah controlled side, under Hezbollah's rules, to see what Hezbollah wanted them to see, no more and no less, and to broadcast that, no more and no less. In 2008, they similarly refused to permit Western journalists access to Gaza, which meant there was no independent confirmation of any casualty reports, and Western news outlets could either report the numbers coming from Palestinian sources or report no numbers at all. Most split the difference by reporting very vague numbers for as long as they could, but surely the Israeli side would only have been helped by having independent witnesses on the ground.)

The problem is that all too often the American military has responded to claims made against it by saying merely that an incident is under investigation. That is not a response. That is an answer that simultaneously freezes the potential for response—because what it says is that no *real* response will be forthcoming for an indefinite period of time—and one

that opens the possibility that the claims made by the other side might be true, because if they weren't, what would be the need for an investigation? If in fact the truth is not known, then by all means an investigation is in order, because nothing will erode credibility more rapidly than to have to reverse positions already taken. But it is critical that investigations be completed as quickly as possible, while issues remain in the public eye, and that they not be used as a rhetorical crutch if there is no real need for them.

Consider what happens when military units think strategically about the role the media play in operations. In November 2004, the first thing the marines did before beginning the full brunt of the assault on Fallujah was to take control of the hospital,¹⁷³ ensuring that it could not be used as a center for negative, false propaganda—at least without that propaganda being immediately countered, or without Western media being able to confirm or deny claims for themselves.¹⁷⁴

Despite the fact that much of the press coverage centered on a series of themes designed to downplay the marines' accomplishment in clearing out the city of Fallujah,¹⁷⁵ the overall effort was still perceived as a success—or at least was not seen as a failure. Several polls showed the slightest rise in positive attitudes toward the war at around that time.¹⁷⁶ Put simply, the “absence of Western media in Fallujah allowed the insurgents greater control of information . . . Because Western reporters were at risk of capture and beheading, they stayed out and were forced to pool video shot by Arab cameramen and played on Al Jazeera.”¹⁷⁷ By contrast, “[f]alse allegations of noncombatant casualties were made by Arab media in both campaigns, but in the second case embedded Western reporters offered a rebuttal.”¹⁷⁸

Military spokespeople should be permitted to speak to the public and the press when they are only able to speak in terms of probabilities. So long as they make clear that they are only able to speak in those limited terms—we cannot be positive yet, we are in the midst of an accountability check to confirm, but we do not believe the claim that marines have been captured—there will be times when doing so will be far less damaging than saying nothing until they are able to speak with absolute certainty.

There is, of course, more to being proactive. Opportunities come along to either get ahead of a particular story or, on occasion, make news, and the military has been too hesitant on both accounts. For example, when enemy media labs have been captured, some of the material found there has been what might best be referred to as Islamist blooper reels. So that :

they put a video out, but when we find these places we find a lot of their edits, and . . . they have stuff they saved where they botched it up, for example a guy riding a horse with a gun and he's trying to look tough and he hits a tree and it knocks him off.¹⁷⁹

Let's face it, that's nothing short of comedy gold—you literally couldn't make that up. Having footage of that nature fall into your hands presents an unbelievable opportunity. Why wasn't that clip ever circulated to make that group look ridiculous, to puncture their carefully crafted image of strength, of toughness, and manliness—and most of all, of competence? Indeed, that wasn't the only such video.

[There was] another one where a guy's on the back of a motorcycle, he's going to jump off and start shooting, he looks real tough, but when he jumps off he just falls head over heels, the guy goes flying.¹⁸⁰

Obviously, that clip was never released either.

What was the reason for the hesitance? There was, of course, a famous video released of Zarqawi that made him look exceedingly foolish—the highlight was probably the moment where he was supposed to be firing his weapon for dramatic effect, but it jams, and, unsure what to do next, he signals over an underling, who, also unsure what to do, grabs the gun by the (now very hot) barrel and very obviously burns himself. Apparently there were negative reactions to that video that led to the decision to hold-off on further releases:

A lot of folks in the theater particularly reacted like we were making fun of him in a way [well, that would have been a correct interpretation of course, we were -cd], and we did do some polling and . . . , it didn't come off so well, [which is] why we're a little tentative.¹⁸¹

The polling data were unavailable, so it is impossible to comment on it specifically, but when a communications strategy does not work as well as hoped, it is often a better idea to look for ways to improve upon the execution of the strategy than to toss it entirely. Was the response to the Zarqawi video really so negative that it suggests there is absolutely no point revisiting the use of such material, in any configuration, with any framing or presentation, at any point? Or were there nuances to those responses that could be used in crafting such releases? I cannot say without access to the data, but surely there is some way to make use of material such as this when it falls into the military's possession. Closer study of the Zarqawi data is clearly warranted—if this material has been found in some labs, it will be found in others, and having a skeletal strategy in place that takes that experience into account would be well worthwhile.

At a minimum, trying to determine if the negative response was to some extent context-based would be very important.

The war against Islamist insurgents will continue to be, in large part, a war against arguments, symbols, and images. That such a war is being fought in an information context unlike any other only complicates the challenges faced by the U.S. Army, and the U.S. military generally. New information and communication technologies are being used to great synergistic effect by the enemy: the military has to understand how this works and be prepared to make use of such technologies to counter enemy messaging to the extent possible, as quickly as possible. This cannot, by definition, be left to the PAO community, but must be understood by, and participated in, the entire military to have a chance at success.

ENDNOTES

1. "Hezbollah Dot Com: Hezbollah's Online Campaign," n.p.:n.d), p. 19.

2. For a more detailed discussion of the conditions under which particular types of attacks will attract coverage, and the amount of coverage they are likely to attract under which circumstances—in other words, using the amount of press coverage a particular attack gains as a metric for its success, see Cori E. Dauber, "The Terrorist Spectacular and the Ladder of Terrorist Success," in James Forest, ed, *Influence Warfare: How Terrorists and Governments Shape Perceptions in a War of Ideas*, West Port, CT: Praeger Security International, 2009, pp. 93-122.

3. Majid Tehranian, "Review of Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 4, November, 1995, pp. 523-525, available from links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0020-7438%28199511%2927%3A4%3C523%3AS

MBRCC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Y. The reviewer makes clear, however, that these tapes alone were not sufficient for the revolution to succeed.

4. See 304th MI Bn OSINT Team, "Al Qaida Like Mobile Discussions and Potential Creative Uses," Supplemental to the 304th MI Bn Periodic Newsletter, October 16, 2008. Although marked For Official Use Only, the document has been posted to the web by the Federation of the American Scientists at www.fas.org/irp/eprint/mobile.pdf. The author points out that there is no confirmation some of the technologies discussed in the paper are being used in the ways proposed by Islamists on chat rooms. The point is that they are aggressively seeking to develop as many applications as possible, p. 2. There is no question that many of the applications, even of technologies now quite commonplace, are as creative as any of the past—for example using cell phone interfaces as a medium for the dispersal of propaganda, p. 3.

5. Noah Shachtman, "Online Jihadists Plan for 'Invading Facebook'," Wired blog network, *Danger Room*, December 18, 2008, available from blog.wired.com/defense/2008/12/online-jihadist.html. When Facebook was made aware of an Islamist presence on their site (by a media inquiry), the page was shut down immediately, which has not been the reaction of every site informed they were hosting such material. See Joel Mowbray, "Jihadist Group Trying to 'Invade' Facebook Gets Shutdown," *Foxnews.com*, December 19, 2008, available from www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,470385,00.html. The Psychological Operations Officer for the CJSOTF-AP does report Facebook and other social networking sites being used by some of the larger insurgent groups in Iraq as a way to get their message out as of 2009. David Jenkins, Interview with the Author, Fort Carson, CO, May 19, 2009.

6. 304th MI Bn OSINT Team, "Al Qaida Like Mobile Discussions and Potential Creative Uses," Supplemental to the 304th MI Bn Periodic Newsletter, October 16, 2008. Although marked For Official Use Only, the document has been posted to the web by the Federation of the American Scientists at www.fas.org/irp/eprint/mobile.pdf.

7. Wretchard, "The Blogosphere At War," *The Belmont Club*, December 28, 2006, available from fallbackbelmont.blogspot.

com/2006/12/blogosphere-at-war.html. The Belmont Club is a very popular and respected site, receiving thousands of page views a day.

8. Stuart Elliott, "A CBS Take on the YouTube Madness," *New York Times*, February 28, 2007, *nytimes.com*, available from *www.nytimes.com/2007/02/28/business/media/28adco.html*.

9. Katherine Q. Seelye, "YouTube Passes Debates to a New Generation," *New York Times*, June 14, 2007, *nytimes.com*, available from *www.nytimes.com/2007/06/14/us/politics/14youtube.html?r=1&oref=slogin*.

10. Matea Gold, "The Conflict in Iraq: Video of the Execution; In the Internet Age, TV Faced A Dilemma," *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 2006, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, available from *web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=c5854ab292540d8fa0a8248c3aff2870&_docnum=29&wchp=dGLbVzz-zSkVA&_md5=0bc412d3de16f5a9ec1f708993c43e1*.

11. In poor countries, where Americans would not assume the population would necessarily have access to cell phones, they may actually be using phones far more sophisticated than those most Americans are used to. The infrastructure of the landline networks may be so decrepit and backwards that it becomes easier to simply skip over the landline system and go straight to the most advanced possible cell network. Where people cannot afford those phones, they combine resources so that an entire village may be sharing a single phone, and, although the population may not as a matter of course have access to computers, the phones become their link to the Internet. This has a number of profound social implications, either in reality or in potential. See Garrett Jones, "The Revolution Will Be Brought to You By Text-Messaging," *Foreign Policy Research Institute e-notes*, March 2008, available from *www.fpri.org/enotes/200803.jones.revolutiontextmessaging.html*.

12. "It can now be expected that any new jihadi organizations looking to make their mark and establish an identity will not only attempt to film their operations but also create 1-2 hour produced videos. Existing groups will likely feel pressure to continue to release new video material or risk being pronounced 'dead' and

'on the run' by the media . . ." IntelCenter, "The Evolution of Jihadi Video, EJV)," v. 1.0, May 11, 2005, p. 4, available from www.intelcenter.com/EJV-PUB-v1-0.pdf, p. 2.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

14. Ronald Schleifer, "Psychological Operations: A New Variation on an Age Old Art: Hezbollah versus Israel," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, 2006, p. 6. Although there is no evidence it ever happened—or was even a viable idea—the fact that al-Qaeda sympathizers were discussing the possibility of strapping a cell phone camera to a missile warhead, to capture footage all the way in to the target, is evidence of the priority still placed on acquiring footage. 304th MI Bn OSINT Team, "Al Qaida Like Mobile Discussions and Potential Creative Uses," Supplemental to the 304th MI Bn Periodic Newsletter, October 16, 2008, p. 4. Although marked For Official Use Only, the document has been posted to the web by the Federation of the American Scientists, available from www.fas.org/irp/eprint/mobile.pdf.

15. Indeed, analysts have noted that as soon as the Algerian group Salafist Group for Call and Combat merged with al-Qaeda, its media efforts and production values immediately began to improve. See Stephen Black, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's Burgeoning Media Apparatus," *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 4, No. 14, May 15, 2007, available from www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373396. For a description of the development of al-Qaeda's media strategy, see Henry Schuster, "Al-Qaeda's Media Strategy," in Karen J. Greenberg, ed., *Al-Qaeda Now: Understanding Today's Terrorists*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 112-124.

16. Colonel Kenneth Tovo, Commander U.S. Special Forces 10th Group and Former Commander Combined Joint Special Operations Forces Task Force, Arabian Peninsula, Interview with the Author, September 21, 2006, Ft. Carson, CO.

17. Abdel bari Atwan, *The Secret History of al-Qaeda*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, p. 122.

18. Personal correspondence with the Author, June 12, 2007.

19. Iranian authorities have had great difficulty locating anti-government blogs to shut them down. *The Guardian* reported that the government took the step, perhaps unprecedented when compared to the rest of the world, of ordering telecommunications companies to restrict the speed at which material could be accessed to 128 kbps – in effect, banning high speed internet – specifically to make it next to impossible for Iranians to download the kinds of materials (songs, video clips, television shows) the authorities view as carriers of negative cultural influences from the West. See Robert Tait, “Iran Bans Fast Internet to Cut West’s Influence,” *The Guardian*, October 18, 2006, available from technology.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,1924637,00.html.

20. “A World Wide Web of Terror,” *The Economist*, July 12, 2007, available from www.economist.com/world/displaystory.cfm?story_id=9472498.

21. Deborah L. Wheeler, “Empowering Publics: Information Technology and Democratization in the Arab World—Lessons From Internet Cafes and Beyond,” Research Report No. 11, Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford Internet Institute, July 2006, pp. 6-7.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

23. Alan Cowell, “Britain Arrests 9 Suspects in Terrorist Kidnapping Plot,” *New York Times*, January 31, 2007, available from nytimes.com, www.nytimes.com/2007/02/01/world/europe/01britainhtml?ex=1170997200&en=50c3676a80e47899&ei=5070&emc=eta1. Interestingly, the group apparently planned to behead the soldier. What none of the press coverage of the arrests mentioned was that after a series of hostage beheadings were filmed and that footage uploaded to the Internet in Iraq, beginning with that of the American Nicholas Berg (whose example was mentioned in the coverage), the practice of filming beheadings stopped – although decapitated bodies continued to turn up regularly in Baghdad. An intercepted letter from Zawahiri to Zarqawi, although its authenticity has never been definitively proven, requested the practice stop because it was so brutal and gruesome that it was hurting the movement’s image, not helping.

24. "Protection For Muslim Police in Kidnap Fear," *Daily Mail*, February 2, 2007, available from www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=433298&in_page_id=1770.

25. "A World Wide Web of Terror," *The Economist*, July 12, 2007, available from www.economist.com/world/displaystory.cfm?story_id=9472498.

26. Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006 Ed. (orig. pub. 1998), p. 206.

27. Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges*, Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2006, pp. 91-92.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

29. Susan B. Glaser and Steve Coll, "The Web as Weapon: Zarqawi Intertwines Acts on Ground in Iraq with Propaganda Campaign on the Internet," *The Washington Post*, August 9, 2005, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=b9d74f52e88e19e8531bae8bae901a31&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=973034f5f87f54c5c2f367909c698ccb.

30. Michael R. Gordon, "Deadliest Bomb In Iraq Is Made In Iran, US Says," *New York Times*, February 10, 2007, nytimes.com, available from www.nytimes.com/2007/02/10/world/middleeast/10weapons.html?pagewanted=1&ei=5094&en=e9a9ae56cb1df98a&hp&ex=1171170000&partner=homepage.

31. Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Jenkins, Director of Operations for the Combined Media Processing Center, Qatar, Interview by phone, December 3, 2007.

32. *Ibid.* Interestingly, as of December, 2007, no Apple platforms have been captured in Iraq.

33. Thomas Harding, "Terrorists Use Google Maps to Hit UK Troops," January 13, 2007, *The Daily Telegraph*, telegraph.co.uk, available from www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/01/13/wgoogle13.xml.

34. Almost immediately after the attack, a legal case was brought before India's high court asking that Google Earth be banned for aiding terrorism, and that Google be instructed to "blur" images of "sensitive" sites until the case was decided. Since any civilian site is a potential terrorist target, it is unclear how the Court was supposed to determine what specific instructions to issue Google, or how Google was to interpret an order of this nature. See "Google Earth Aided Mumbai Attacks," *Perth Now*, December 11, 2008, available from www.news.com.au/perthnow/story/0,21498,24784014-948,00.html?from=public_rss.

35. Jenkins.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Donald Bacon, Chief of Plans for Special Operations and Intelligence working Public Affairs Matters in the Strategic Communication Department of MNF-I, Interviewed by Phone, November 10, 2007.

38. Glaser and Coll, "Web as Weapon."

39. Lieutenant Colonel Terry Guild, Interview with the Author, MacDill AFB, Tampa, FL, August 15, 2006.

40. Bacon.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Haviv Rettig, "Iraqi Insurgents Using YouTube to Distribute Propaganda," *Jerusalem Post*, February 22, 2007, jpost.com, available from www.jpost.com/serolet/Satellite?cid=1171894497777&pagename=JPost%2FJPostArticle%2FShowFull.

43. When Senator Joseph Lieberman demanded that the most popular of the video sharing sites, YouTube, then owned by Google, take down the videos posted by or from Islamic terrorist groups, the site at first resisted on the grounds that, "While we respect and understand his [Lieberman's] views, YouTube encourages free speech and defends everyone's right to express unpopular points of view." They quickly reversed themselves, changing their policy to forbid videos that include an incitement

to violence, but it is unlikely that will remove all of the videos, first because that it is a quite subjective standard, but more practically because there are so many videos on the site – and so many added each day – that it has always been “self-policing,” meaning that users must file complaints before particular videos are taken down, which means someone has to come across a particular video, find it offensive, and contact site management before anything will be done. See Peter Whonskey, “YouTube Bans Videos That Incite Violence,” *Washington Post*, September 12, 2008, p. D-1, available from [washingtonpost.com, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/11/AR2008091103447.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/11/AR2008091103447.html).

44. Michael Scheuer, “Al-Qaeda’s Media Doctrine: Evolution From Cheerleader to Opinion Shaper,” *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 4. Issue 15, Washington, DC: The Jamestown Foundation, May 22, 2007, available from jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373417.

45. Rhonda Schwartz and Maddy Sauer, “Dead US Soldier in Anti-War Video ‘Alive and Well’,” *The Blotter*, *ABCNews.com*, January 8, 2007, available from blogs.abcnews.com/theblotter/2007/01/dead_us_soldier.html.

46. Lieutenant Colonel Edward Loomis, Division Public Affairs Officer, 101st Airborne Division, phone interview with the author, February 9, 2007.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

49. It is not clear that professional journalists are using editing software any different from what the average citizen would use. For the combat phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom, CBS was preparing to use Adobe Premiere for producers and photojournalists, and the basic free MovieMaker 2 program that Microsoft includes with its Windows XP operating system. Mike Wendland, “From ENG to SNG: TV Technology for Covering the Conflict with Iraq,” *Poynteronline*, March 6, 2003, available from www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=23585.

50. There are a variety of sources on the Internet offering advice to families preparing for a soldier or marine’s deployment,

and inevitably, particularly if there are young children involved, “get a webcam if you don’t already have one” always makes the list. See, for example, Tom Gordon, “When a Soldier Comes Home,” *The Birmingham News*, November 10, 2008, available from blog.al.com/living-news/2008/11/when_a_soldier_comes_home.html. This is, of course, the high tech way to make sure a very young child doesn’t forget an absent parent. The low tech solution is “flat daddy,” a life-size cardboard version of the deployed soldier.

51. Wendland, “From ENG to SNG.”

52. This is based in part on the typology in Ben Venzke, “Jihadi Master Video Guide, JMVG) v1.1,” May 18, 2006, IntelCenter, Alexandria, VA, available from www.intelcenter.com/JMVG-V1-1.pdf.

53. I asked a well-known Professor of Documentary Film-making, himself a documentarian, to watch clips posted by as-Sahab, al-Qaeda Central’s media operation, on YouTube. These were relatively sophisticated propaganda pieces, making use of what were, to the untrained eye, very elaborate special effects. He commented that,

Yes it is fairly sophisticated in terms of the use of special effects and editing, but the person making it may have simply been trained on and used a special effects program, such as Adobe After Effects to put these layers together on a AppleMac computer, using information that came with the program and then edited sequences together in Apple’s Final Cut Pro. Our students use these programs and they are readily available in Europe and elsewhere.

Gorham Kindham, Personal correspondence with the author, April 7, 2007. He also noted that since the clips were being filmed for the Internet, and not for screening in theaters, high resolution cameras would not be necessary—off-the-shelf videocameras would be more than sufficient. Personal correspondence, April 8, 2007. Both comments were made after viewing “Futur (sic) Martyrs of Iraq.” So once video clips filmed in Iraq or Afghanistan are posted to the web, the person putting the final, finished propaganda video together can be anywhere in the world, a

point made in Daniel Kimmage and Kathleen Ridolfo, *The War of Images and Ideas: Iraqi Insurgent Media*, Washington, DC: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 2007. This means that the lack of Mac platforms in Iraq does not mean that produced videos about Iraq were not made using Mac equipment and software. *And it is wrong to assume that because a video appears with what seems to be "high" production values that a sophisticated lab was necessary.* It might still be the product of a "guy and a laptop" if it is the right guy with the right laptop.

54. At least in the case of Iraq, it appears that the sub-titles are added by others outside the country. Videos captured inside the country have only had English-language sub-titles in two cases as of December 2007. Pedro Vega Colon, Media Chief for J3 under Combined Media Processing Center, Qatar, Interview by phone, December 3, 2007.

55. I am indebted to Mark Robinson for this insight, along with many others.

56. Jenkins. My thanks to Mark Robinson for his invaluable assistance with this point.

57. Philip Nelson, Senior Vice President of Strategic Development, NewTek, quoted in Eliot Van Buskirk, "TV Studio in a Box Enables Long-Tail Television," Epicenter, Wired Blog Network, December 18, 2008, available from blog.wired.com/business/2008/12/tv-studio-in-a.html.

58. Eliot Van Buskirk, "TV Studio in a Box Enables Long-Tail Television," Epicenter, Wired Blog Network, December 18, 2008, available from blog.wired.com/business/2008/12/tv-studio-in-a.html.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Jenkins.

61. Glaser and Coll, "Web as Weapon." See also Weimann, *Terror on the Internet*, p. 9.

62. Brian Krebs, "Terrorism's Hook Into Your Inbox: UK Case Shows Link Between Online Fraud and Jihadist

Networks," *Washington Post*, [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/05/AR2007070501153.html?referrer=emailarticle), available from www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/05/AR2007070501153.html?referrer=emailarticle July 3, 2007.

63. Global Islamic Media Front: Media Sword Campaign Defending the State of Islam, available from Lauramansfield.com.

64. Guild.

65. Weimann, *Terror on the Internet*, p. 66.

66. See for example, "Behind Enemy Lines: Inside the Insurgency," ABC News: *Nightline*, February 14, 2006, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=15e7e48b7027fb21ccd3fe52bf464b48&_docnum=9&wchp=dGLbVzb-zSkVA&_md5=b7530bbb317816b48fdc453cb32cf5b2; Glaser and Coll.

67. "Insurgent Video Shows Burning Body of American Pilot," NBC *Nightly News With Brian Williams*, April 5, 2006, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=b64947e1c416ff6c0492b7c1afa67c72&_docnum=3&wchp=dGLbVzb-zSkVA&_md5=0d79dd40bd6139016cd7a797f384305d.

68. See "Chopper Down Commercial Aircraft Attacked," ABC *World News Tonight*, April 21, 2005, available from Lexis Nexis Academic, http://web.lexisnexuscomlibproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=ca7f7e7a9f83b32bf1f9a820ef6c3c1d&_docnum=3&wchp=dGLbVzb-zSkVA&_md5=91703314a928adea3dfd1889d0df326b.

69. Lee Cowan, "Recent Surge of Violence Continues in Iraq," CBS *Evening News*, April 22, 2005, available from Lexis Nexis Academic, www.lexisnexus.comlibproxylib.unc.edu/us/lnacademic/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T5437708677&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T5437708680&cisb=22_T5437708679&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=166768&docNo=1.

70. See "Video Released of Downing of Commercial Helicopter in Iraq," NBC *Nightly News*, April 22, 2005, available

from Lexis-Nexis Academic, *web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=0998bed156ba807e4567d428594c0b0e&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVzb-zSkVA&_md5=31cacdb320a900ea08d3a5553290d5f1*.

71. Cowan, "Surge of Violence Continues."

72. Although it went nowhere, one lawmaker, for example, demanded the Pentagon end the ability of CNN's reporters to participate in their program for embedding reporters with military units in Iraq. See Anne Plummer Flaherty, "Lawmaker Faults CNN for Sniper Video," *SFGate.com*, October 23, 2006, available from *www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2006/10/23/national/w161647D63.DTL7*.

73. See for example, Ashraf al-Taie, "US Nabs Website Producer," *MSNBC.com*, October 16, 2005, available from *msnbc.msn.com/id/9720497/*, accessed July 2, 2006.

74. "Hidden Killers in Iraq?" *Anderson Cooper 360*, CNN, October 18, 2006, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, *web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=d3f40ef6665b6a4326d3024b652a2274&_docnum=10&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=1307c13a5e18c79ce7b7012d2ed5307f*. My emphasis. This includes all subsequent quotations.

75. *Ibid.*

76. CBS, at least, has several people on its staff responsible for monitoring the relevant websites for both claims and footage that are pertinent, although they claim that they have procedures in place to ensure that additional confirmation is developed before either makes it onto the air. Lara Logan, phone interview from Baghdad with the author, January 14, 2007.

77. It is possible, as Dorrance Smith suggests, that at least some of the time the segments are not accessed by the American networks but are provided by cooperative arrangements with al Jazeera. See Dorrance Smith, "The Enemy on Our Airwaves: What is the Relationship Between al-Jazeera, al-Qaeda and America's TV Networks?" *OpinionJournal.com*, November 4, 2005, available from *www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=110007498*. CBS,

according to Lara Logan, has individuals specifically tasked with monitoring the pertinent websites, so that network, at least, is taking the material directly from the terrorists and insurgents, not using any intermediary. Interestingly, that process is located in London. Lara Logan, Interview with the author by phone from Baghdad, January 14, 2007.

78. An additional problem is that too often footage shown with some form of identification one time often has the identifying material edited out in subsequent airings, particularly when the footage is used as file footage in later stories. Because even when the source of the footage is clearly identified in the reporter's narration in the original story, (which I would argue is still insufficient cuing) it never is in subsequent uses of the footage. If the original material were marked with a chyron, there would be no mistaking the source, important when the Arabic writing alone will not serve as sufficient visual cue to an American audience that this is not normal news footage.

79. The music is often based on MP3 options left on websites made for that purpose. See Kimmage and Ridolfo, *The War of Images and Ideas*, pp. 31-33.

80. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Dirty Politics, Deception, Distraction, and Democracy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 147.

81. Campaign Reform: Insights and Evidence," *Report of the Task Force on Campaign Reform, Pew Charitable Trusts*, Princeton, NJ: Woodrow Wilson School of International Affairs, Princeton University, 1998.

82. All quotes are from Susan Walsh, President White House News Photographers Association, Letter to Members, www.whnppa.org/join/walshletter111605.pdf.

83. It is well known that the White House press corps was very upset to have been excluded (except for several print reporters representing the regular pool) when President Obama retook the oath of office. In that case, however, the event was of genuine historical significance—and indeed, because they were excluded, we lack footage of the event, but have only stills and an audio

84. Ben Venzke, "Jihadi Master Video Guide, JMVG) v1.1," May 18, 2006, IntelCenter, Alexandria, VA, available from *www.intelcenter.com/JMVG-V1-1.pdf*.

86. The source for these figures is the data base, "Iraq Coalition Casualty Count," generally considered to be accurate and trustworthy. "Fatalities by Cause of Death Detail," available from icasualties.org/oif/stats.aspx.

88. John Yang, "Seven Die in Helicopter Crash," *NBC Nightly News*, February 7, 2007, available from video.msn.com/v/us/v.htm?g=3795a63b-b721-40ac-8025-79d121277490&f=34&fg=rss, via *The Tyndall Report*, tyndallreport.com.

90. Lara Logan, "Enemies in Iraq Know US Military Relies on Helicopters," *CBS Evening News*, February 7, 2007, available from Lexis/Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=7ff9daae1cb2147a26b08a0f9f531a62&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLzVlz-zSkVb&_md5=32a5571b4afbc2de94bbc1151a58eaf5.

92. See the discussion in, for example, Jurgen Trimborn and Edna McCown, *Leni Riefenstahl: A Life*, London, UK: Faber and Faber, January 2008.

93. Schleifer, "Psychological Operations," p. 6.

94. A number of bloggers claimed that footage used in Logan's report on Haifa street that CBS shunted to their website rather than air, came from an al-Qaeda website and that she did not—and should have—note that in the report. CBS responded that even if the footage also appeared on the al-Qaeda site, that was not Logan's source. See Brian Montopoli, "Questions Surround Haifa Street Video," *Public Eye*, January 30, 2007, available from www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2007/01/30/publiceye/entry2414754.shtml.

95. NBC and CBS had footage that could not possibly have been of a particular attack under discussion—and they knew it—yet aired the footage anyway, even though they explained the footage didn't match the attack being described. For further discussion, see Cori E. Dauber, "The Truth Is Out There: Responding to Insurgent Deception and Disinformation Operations," *Military Review*, Vol. 89, January-February 2009, pp. 13-24.

96. Interview with the author, Pamela Hess, then the Pentagon-correspondent for UPI, March 9, 2007, Washington, DC.

97. For an example of particularly well done analysis of visual images taken from news coverage, see David D. Perlmutter, *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy: Icons of Outrage in International Crises*, Greenwood, CT: Praeger, 1998.

98. *Anderson Cooper 360*, CNN, October 18, 2006.

99. *Anderson Cooper 360*, CNN, October 18, 2006.

100. *Anderson Cooper 360*, CNN, October 18, 2006.

101. Sally Buzbee, "Zarqawi said to be sidelined by new 'coalition of insurgents'," *The Age*, Australia, April 5, 2006, p. 13, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic. They have also taken civilian hostages. See Stephen Farrell and Charles Bremner, *The Times*, London, September 1, 2004, p. 1, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic.

102. Although that is not the only way and it is, to be sure, not a guarantee. See Dauber, "The Terrorist Spectacular."

103. For a discussion of the criteria that will determine whether a particular bombing will make the news, and, if so, how much attention it is likely to receive, see Dauber, "Terrorist Spectacular."

104. In point of fact, the Islamic Army of Iraq was at the time one of the most important Sunni insurgent groups.

105. For the year 2007, for example, the Tyndall Report, which monitors the broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) notes that:

The War in Iraq was Story of the Year by a wide margin. The networks monitored the progress of Commander in Chief George Bush's troop build-up—the so-called surge—in Iraq and the simultaneous debate on Capitol Hill about bringing troops home. That storyline effectively ended in September when Gen David Petraeus testified to Congress that violence in Iraq was moderating and the President ordered the extra troops home. Before that testimony, the Iraq War averaged 30 minutes of coverage each week; in the year's final 15 weeks the average was a scant four minutes. Non-war coverage of Iraq continues its steady decline.

Notice, however, that those totals combine coverage of the war itself with the debate in Washington. Tyndall calculates that actual combat coverage over the course of the year was only 61 percent of the total. See tyndallreport.com/yearinreview2007/. The networks' ability to report much more than casualty reports is now deeply compromised, as their regular bureau operations have all but shut down. See Brian Stelter, "TV News Winds Down Operations On Iraq War," *New York Times*, December 28, 2008, nytimes.com, available from www.nytimes.com/2008/12/29/business/media/29bureaus.html?partner=permalink&exp=prod=permalink. The press outlets constantly repeat the refrain that the American people are tired of the war and will not sit for continued war news, but produce no evidence in support of the claim. What is clear is that they have little interest

in continuing to foot the growing bill for covering the war, when reduced violence reduces the number of easy-to-cover-stories, in the sense that they can be produced via a well-worn, time honored template, rinse, lather, repeat, but instead require some degree of creativity. By 2 weeks before the 2008 election, coverage of Iraq had plummeted to a mere 1 percent of all stories, across not only broadcast TV, but also cable, newspapers, radio, and online news sources. See Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, *PEJ News Coverage Index*, October 6-12, 2008, available from journalism.org, www.journalism.org/node/13204.

106. Dan Harris, "News Headlines," *ABC World News Tonight Sunday*, April 17, 2005, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/us/lnacademic/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T5381421803&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=376&resultsUrlKey=29_T5381421806&cisb=22_T5381421805&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8277&docNo=400.

107. In fairness, the press is often limited by the information provided by the military, which is intentionally kept to the bare minimum to deny the enemy what could be its only means of battle damage assessment. While the desire to keep critical information out of enemy hands is certainly understandable, in a war where information is itself so often a key battleground, the military needs to reevaluate how this is done. In earlier conflicts there were no opportunity costs—nothing to balance against the benefit of withholding information. Today there is. The benefits of releasing information on casualties may not be enough to outweigh the risks, but the calculation needs to be made, and it may be the case that more information ought to be released earlier, or that mechanisms to release information without doing harm can be explored. I discuss these trade-offs at greater length in Cori E. Dauber, "Winning the Battle But Losing the War: the Relationship Between the Media Coverage of Iraq and Public Support," May, 2005, Chapel Hill, NC, unpublished ms.

108. It should be noted, however, that reports of American combat casualties *per se* is not what reduces public support for a given military operation, even though that is widely assumed to be the case, particularly by the press. Support will hold so long as the public continues to believe there is hope for the success of the

mission; in other words, if the public continues to be optimistic. It is only when the public loses faith in the mission, begins to believe that there is no hope—in other words, that American lives are being lost *for no reason*—that continued casualties will erode support in a substantial way. In other words, to erode the will to fight, these groups need both types of stories, and both types of images, stories about continued (and continuing) American combat casualties, and stories that suggest the mission is not and *will not in the future be* successful. For an elaboration of the argument on the relationship between optimism and public support in the face of combat casualties (along with substantial empirical data), see Christopher Gelpi, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler, “Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq,” *International Security*, Vol. 30, Winter 2005/2006, pp. 7-46, available from www.duke.edu/~gelpi/success.matters.pdf.

109. *Anderson Cooper 360*, CNN, October 18, 2006.

110. The military, it should be said, made a tremendous mistake in refusing to respond to CNN’s story. While it was understandable that they did not want to discuss the sniper threat *per se* for operational reasons, they needed to at least try to get someone on camera making the case that the fact that these were propaganda tapes made a difference in the weight people gave them and how people looked at them.

111. In fact, enemy sniper teams are far more at risk from our own than they are capable of doing damage, an argument, to be fair, addressed by CNN in their story. Reporting on one unit, 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, but a unit stationed at Ramadi when it was the heart of the insurgency and therefore in heavy contact, Michael Fumento notes that, “Meanwhile enemy snipers, though generally the most skilled of the enemy fighters and armed primarily with good 7.62 millimeter Soviet Dragunov sniper rifles, have killed 1 member of the battalion. The battalion plus its support units have lost a total of 8 men while killing about 600—a stunning ratio of 75:1.” “Return to Ramadi,” *Weekly Standard*, November 27, 2006, available from weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/012/985qugel.asp.

112. *Anderson Cooper 360*, CNN, October 18, 2006.

113. David Doss, "Why We Aired the Sniper Video," October 19, 2006, *Anderson Cooper 360 Blog*, available from www.cnn.com/CNN/Programs/anderson.cooper.360/blog/archives/2006_10_15_ac360_archive.html.

114. *Anderson Cooper 360*, CNN, October 19, 2006. available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=e9a3bcff5e517bfe5db27a0a2d94c26f&_docnum=9&wchp=dGLbVzW-zSkVA&_md5=dbe566989b798d2b4861aaffd2b8fc1f.

115. Those outlets that did less cropping of the photograph of the mutilated bodies of the contractors in Fallujah received a very strong negative reaction from their audiences, for example. See the oddly mistitled Paul Nussbaum, "Reaction to Graphic Images Somewhat Subdued," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 2, 2004, p. A-6, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/us/lacademic/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T5437716499&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T5437717602&cisb=22_T5437717601&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=144577&docNo=1. This may be in part a function of the shock value of seeing bodies of American soldiers, when the press so rarely makes those images available. The *Los Angeles Times* surveyed 6 months of coverage, running from September 1, 2004, through February 28, 2005, a period that included the marine assault on Fallujah. During that period, "readers of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and *Washington Post* did not see a single picture of a dead serviceman. The *Seattle Times* ran a photo 3 days before Christmas of the covered body of a soldier killed in [a] mess hall bombing. Neither *Time* nor *Newsweek* . . . showed any U.S. battlefield dead during that time." American publications were more willing (and this is not unusual) to show non-American dead, the *New York Times*, for example, printing 55 photos of dead or wounded Iraqis over the same time period. That said, the *LA Times* also provided polling data indicating the public as a whole is supportive of such photos being published (which will continue to be irrelevant, since outlets respond to the number of complaints they receive, not the number of readers or audience members who do not respond directly). The article includes a breakout of the number of images of dead, wounded, and grieving by outlet for

the period, which is quite interesting. See James Rainey, "Unseen Pictures, Untold Stories," *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 2005, available from latimes.com, www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-iraqphoto21may21,1,5119073.story.

116. One would have thought that after ABC anchor Bob Woodruff and his cameraman were hurt in an IED explosion, the networks—at least ABC—would have had to confront the fact that whatever these images may look like, they are, in fact, pictures of someone's loved one being killed or hurt. Not only did this practice not change, but all three networks used such footage in their coverage of Woodruff's being injured—and ABC's piece on the nature of the roadside bomb as a weapon, which ran as part of their coverage that night, may have been the one that used the most individual segments of this type that night, I counted six as it aired: 5 explosions, and one of a bomb being assembled. See David Wright, "Roadside Bombs, Greatest Cause of Injury, Death," *ABC World News Tonight*, January 29, 2006, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=43a1e91c51ce240f0f40e3967fd8d51b&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVzz-zSkVA&_md5=6b0b937dbe48b1ab144991efbce0a289. (This story aired several months before the *Tyndall Report* began cataloguing reports.)

117. See Sean Aday, "The Real War Will Never Get On Television: An Analysis of Casualty Imagery in American Television Coverage of the Iraq War," Paper presented at the International Studies Association, March 18-20, 2004, Montreal, Canada, available from ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/pmt/exhibits/1537/Aday.pdf.

118. A reporter surveyed metro dailies and found that the photograph of the corpse (he does not specify which of the series) ran on the front page of only 11 out of 34, including the *New York Times* and *USA Today*. Fifteen put the photograph inside the front section, while another eight, including the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Dallas Morning News*, declined to use the image at all. Lou Gelfand, "If You Ran the Newspaper," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, October 19, 1993, available from Lexis/Nexis.

119. This became the subject of a small controversy on the web when an email circulated from Ms. Logan asking people to reach

out to CBS and ask that the piece be aired on the news, rather than the less visible outlet of the Internet venue. See www.mediachannel.org/wordpress/2007/01/24/helping-lara-logan/#logan-letter, accessed October 28, 2007. As was probably inevitable, given heated feelings about the war and the way feelings about the way the war was being covered became a proxy for those feelings, this rapidly became a target people could use to fight through larger issues.

120. "Pixellation" is the high-tech blurring used by television networks when they break an image down to the "pixels" that are used to create it, reversing the process in such a way as to make it impossible to tell what it is supposed to be.

121. For a list of which newspapers presented the photograph in what way, see David D. Perlmutter and Lisa Hatley Major, "Images of Horror From Fallujah," *Nieman Reports*, Vol. 58, Summer 2004, p. 73.

122. This attitude towards the display of the dead body in news images is very much an American one. While it is shared to a lesser degree by the Canadian media, and an even lesser degree by the British, most countries' news outlets, print and broadcast, would display as a matter of course extremely graphic images that would never be seen in the United States.

123. One of the most powerful and memorable photographs taken that day has been called simply "the Jumper" or sometimes "the Falling Man," and although it is taken from a great enough distance that the man's identity cannot be determined (a number of reporters have subsequently tried), what is striking about it is the impression that the man is in a casual, even graceful pose as he falls. Yet the photo has essentially gone down the memory hole, appearing in none of the collections of images that appeared in the aftermath of the attacks, probably because when it did appear there were tremendous numbers of complaints. The photographer who took the shot also took shots of Robert F. Kennedy moments after the assassination, photographs far more graphic, yet they were published without controversy, and continue to be reprinted to this day. He suspects that the reason for the different reaction is that we did not and do not identify with Kennedy. Not being presidential candidates, we do not look at the photographs of him

lying bleeding on a kitchen floor and think, "that could have been me." We have a different emotional response to a picture of an unidentified office worker, killed without warning while sitting at his desk (we assume). See Richard Drew, "The Horror of 9/11 That's All Too Familiar," *The Los Angeles Times*, September 10, 2003, p. B-13, available from *latimes.com*, articles.latimes.com/2003/sep/10/opinion/oe-drew10.

124. ABC was the first to announce this policy (ostensibly based on the comments of a psychiatrist during a special about the effects of the tragedy on children), and the others followed within days. Howard Kurtz, "ABC Stops Endless Replay of Tragedy," September 19, 2001, *Washington Post*, p. C-01, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=e7dd5273408013d9c390ed352968b494&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLzVzz-zSkVb&_md5=b7cdaa1314e01c74d3c154a9376fd7e9.

125. "Herald Editor Apologizes for Publishing Shooting Photos," *Boston Herald*, October 23, 2004, p. 002, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/us/Inacademic/search/homesubmitForm.do.

126. Joan Deppa *et al.*, *The Media and Disasters: Pan Am 103*, Washington Square: New York University Press, 1994, p. 91.

127. When a California paper published a photograph of a sheep that had been badly burned in a wildlife fire, it received complaints precisely paralleling those that papers receive when they publish graphic war images, and their public editor wrote a column describing the decision to publish the image that precisely paralleled the columns that are published when papers are criticized for publishing combat images readers find to be too graphic. See Armando Acuna, "Bee Went Too Far with Burned-Sheep Photo, Some Say," *Sacramento Bee*, October 1, 2003, p. E-3, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic.

128. Weimann and Winn's research suggests that the more sanitized coverage is, the more audiences' opinions of terrorists had changed after viewing it, becoming more positive. Gabriel Weimann and Conrad Winn, *Theater of Terror: Mass Media and International Terrorism*, New York: Longman, 1994, pp. 166-167.

129. Lee Cowan, "Al-Qaeda Linked Group Claims Three US Soldiers Were Killed in Revenge for Rape and Murder of Iraq Girl," *CBS Morning News*, July 11, 2006, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=f0e49596a9d35393413517cf0ca21088&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&_md5=c093139c0bda2fad3c248e604cd05f9a.

130. Mike Boettcher, "Al-Qaeda Linked Group Claiming it Killed Three US Soldiers For Revenge for Rape and Murder of Young Iraqi Woman," *NBC News Today Show*, July 11, 2006, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=36c6b0551396f88db14e3b87440cd0bf&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&_md5=89a12813e52f03794ec4732b390b35a3.

131. I believe there is evidence that such a rhetorical appeal would have been successful after the appearance of the famous photographs from Mogadishu. See Cori E. Dauber, "The Shot Seen 'Round the World: The Impact of the Images of Mogadishu on American Military Operations," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2001, pp. 667-671. I believe since then there has been a shift in public discourse so that "support the troops" really means, in many cases, "protect the troops," so that there is a theme running through much of public argumentation suggesting that it is not so much *their* job to protect *us*, as it is *our* job to protect *them*—for example, by supporting candidates and legislation that will get them out of harm's way. Perhaps that would have made it easier to use a story like this to rally support for removing forces from Iraq, but it may also have made it easier to support an effort, if it were well enough resourced, to go after those who so grievously harmed those we were supposed to protect—yet failed to.

132. Daniel Pearl, reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, was lured to an interview in Pakistan, kidnapped and decapitated. There was essentially no serious discussion or consideration given to the idea that any images would be shown from the video by mainstream media outlets, and only CBS did so. The most controversial choice at that point was one made by a single, alternative weekly, which provided its readers with a hyperlink to the video. See "Freedom to Choose: Why We Linked to the

Video Released by Daniel Pearl's Murderers," *The Boston Phoenix*, June 6-13, 2002, *thebostonphoenix.com*, available from *www.bostonphoenix.com/boston/news_features/editorial/documents/02299081.htm*.

133. Osama bin Laden's number two, Ayman al-Zawahiri, wrote Zarqawi a letter in which he suggested the beheadings were hurting the cause. He suggested hostages be shot instead. See Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Kyle Dabruzzi, "The Next Generation of Jihad," *The Weekly Standard*, June 28, 2007, *weeklystandard.com*, available from *weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/013/805fbvze.asp*.

134. Peter Johnson, "A Death Caught on Tape: Should It Run or Not?" *USA Today*, May 12, 2004, p. 4-D, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, *web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=de45ce18111dbcb86cb3c50934f5f4ba8&_docnum=17&wchp=dGLbVlb-zSkVA&_md5=26e9ec69bab8723707ebd2b670132c49*.

135. Barry Peterson, "Al-Jazeera Airing Video of Two Americans and a British Man Taken Hostage in Baghdad," September 18, 2007, CBS News, *The Saturday Early Show*, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, *web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=e7e67f79005c9342621b4655d1384ef2&_docnum=12&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=c0440b37b05326bfe31fb02a8a193404*.

136. Obviously this is not always true, but in those cases when tapes have been made of Iraqis being killed, the point being made has centered on the number of Iraqis being killed, and quite frequently also on some relationship of the victims to the government (thus implicitly highlighting the weakness of the government, their inability to protect their own, and thus the danger in cooperating with—or perhaps even supporting—the government.) See "Iraqi Group Posts 'Execution Video'," *Al Jazeera.net*, March 4, 2007, available from *english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2007/03/2008525125854381924.html*.

137. Paul Eedle, CNN, "Live From . . ." 13:00, May 13, 2004, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, *web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=35ff7c18e0230d82e00f3c45c32061b8&_docnum=26&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&_md5=f80c8917a602713e56124be3b3d1255a*.

138. Matthew B. Stannard, "Beheading Video Seen as War Tactic; Experts Say Terrorists Employing Grisly Form of Propaganda," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 13, 2004, p. A-1, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=bd51d2965428d7c5bff6c453ce996571&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVzz-zSkVb&_md5=2f27cf28e00b1403016ea2a30f80cddf.

139. Brian Rooney, "Pleading for Mercy, Ken Bigley Video Addresses Tony Blair," ABC News, *World News Tonight with Peter Jennings*, September 24, 2004, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=c79a5f7f20e985d1adce6ba425588672&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=3b3832cdba3f6d268337f6f2e4e90b23. NBC mentioned the video's release, but did not show a clip or quote from it. Tom Brokaw, "New Video Today of British Hostage in Iraq," *NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw*, September 29, 2004, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=1a3349971e33283505b7358851e75bc9&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=b327ba196d2624fbd80004061abc60c9.

140. In the wake of the Nick Berg beheading, the *Dallas Morning News* published one shot frame grabbed from the end of the video, showing the terrorists holding the severed head aloft, however, they printed it on the editorial page, not on the front page, and the head itself was hidden, covered by a black rectangle, "out of respect for the dead man's family and the sensitivities of our readers." They received 87 letters, every one in support of publication, many demanding more such images be shown. The editorial and photo are no longer cached, but the editor's comments are available at Rod Dreher, "DMN Publishes Berg Pic," *NRO's The Corner*, May 12, 2004, available from www.nationalreview.com/thecorner/04_05_09_corner-archive.asp#031706. A full discussion of the debate over the Berg images can be found at Jay Rosen, "News Judgment Old and News Judgment New: American Nicholas Berg Beheaded," *Press Think*, May 16, 2004, available from journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2004/05/16/berg_video.html.

141. Matt Zoller Seitz, "What TV Doesn't Show and Why," *Newark Star-Ledger*, May 14, 2004, p. 63, available from

Lexis-Nexis Academic, *web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=92941542167782bc2a052390060d5580&_docnum=10&wchp=dGLbVlb-zSkVA&_md5=8f04cde6e9836941d93695439c31c5a6*.

142. Stannard, "Beheading Video Seen as War Tactic."

143. See Mary Bosworth and Jeanne Flavin, *Race, Gender, and Punishment: From Colonialism to the War on Terrorism*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007, p. 207. They refer to the picture as showing the detainees as "kneeling in submission" and note that the goggles "brought allegations of torture," citing Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

144. "Donald Rumsfeld Holds Defense Department Briefing," January 22, 2002, FDCH Political Briefings, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, *web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=cbee207ae9d7a6d282ccc92919330798&_docnum=5&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&_md5=124020ab09c4fee6c44075a000573e4a*.

145. I am indebted to Carol K. Winkler of Georgia State University for this insight.

146. Elizabeth Palmer, "S. Korean Hostage is Killed by Iraqi Militants," *CBS Evening News*, June 22, 2004, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, accessed June 24, 2007.

147. Dexter Filkins, "Iraq Tape Shows Decapitation of American," *New York Times*, May 12, 2004, p. A-1, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, *web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=0da114b31a377521c8debfd3b0a3a8e&_docnum=2&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=62d7af944b12f7b39b6313cbfd3fd5b*.

148. Stannard, "Beheading Video Seen as War Tactic."

149. See, for example, Leonard Pitts, "Because America Should Know Better," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 15, 2004, p. 17A, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, *web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=f14719a71233a8638da7dce03bda7fc8e&_docnum=8&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=7a3af61693a7b50*

ae2bad00d8fbe23c4. *USA Today* simply accepted the link between the two events, covering the release of the videotape as “a bloody scene that appears to mark the first violent response to U.S. abuse of Iraqi captives at Baghdad’s Abu (sic) Ghraib prison.” Bill Nichols, “Video Shows Beheading of American Captive,” *USA Today*, May 11, 2004, available from usatoday.com, www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2004-05-11-iraq-beheading_x.htm.

150. Barry Peterson, “American Civilian Beheaded in Baghdad,” *CBS Morning News*, September 21, 2004, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=be341fb253ab40b1855876329a7ec114&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&_md5=31b04d97d94f039026024e6c5db81b5e.

151. Unfortunately, in the superb updating of Hoffman’s book, much of the case study of the media coverage of TWA 847 has fallen away, presumably because the media environment is so different today. (After all, that hijacking took place in a world dominated by three broadcast networks, no cable, no Internet.) All the same, it is worth tracking down the 1998 edition of the book for the chapter, “Terrorism, the Media, and Public Opinion,” pp. 131-155, for a great deal of it remains relevant.

152. Barry Peterson, “Iraqi Kidnappers Allow British Hostage Kenneth Bigley to Make Videotaped Plea for His Life,” *CBS News, The Early Show*, September 23, 2004, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=e7e67f79005c9342621b4655d1384ef2&_docnum=8&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=48487373802ed27cd06c96545af96487.

153. Ned Colt, “Another American Hostage Beheaded By Insurgents in Iraq,” *NBC Nightly News*, September 21, 2004, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=1a3349971e33283505b7358851e75bc9&_docnum=5&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=cea0f35531309ae b51bc8a0e394f0b8.

154. Dan Rather, “Al-Jazeera Airs Video of Kidnapped Briton Kenneth Bigley,” *CBS Evening News*, September 29, 2004, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=1a3349971e33283505b7358851e75bc9&_docnum=5&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=cea0f35531309ae b51bc8a0e394f0b8.

[edu/universe/document?_m=a5b1f47c49f1f8f028cb06eb8cf01605&_docnum=3&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=1347aa597e239de945903741113f9a15](http://lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=a5b1f47c49f1f8f028cb06eb8cf01605&_docnum=3&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=1347aa597e239de945903741113f9a15).

155. Preston Mendenhall, "New Video Emerges of Four Hostages Held in Iraq," *NBC Nightly News*, January 28, 2006, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=f12e1daba2d050b42d51da31893f3ca6&_docnum=3&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=a6c448335d154cf922d59ea0109a2f2c.

156. Lara Logan, "Kidnapped American Peace Activist Found Dead in Baghdad," *CBS Evening News*, March 11, 2006, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/universe/document?_m=80c6cb3eb138dd62e8b0a70d80fc836c&_docnum=2&wchp=dGLbVtb-zSkVA&_md5=1921b8660c7a1c681e95a1a01577a222.

157. It is also important to consider the possibility that there will be a revisioning of older forms of hostage taking for the purpose of gaining media attention given the amount of coverage given the attacks on the Mumbai hotels. See Cori E. Dauber, "Mumbai Memo," unpublished manuscript, Carlisle, PA, November 28, 2008.

158. One of the last Westerners taken hostage, for example, was Jill Carroll, a freelance reporter for the *Christian Science Monitor* when she was kidnapped on January 7, 2006, and held for 82 days before being released.

159. Carroll's family appeared when they had a prepared statement they wished to read—and when they did so, they were essentially given the air time they wanted, and briefly asked questions that directly fed the family's goals; for example, of using CNN as a platform for sending a message directly to the kidnappers. See "An Interview with Jill Carroll's Mother," *CNN American Morning*, January 19, 2006, available from Lexis-Nexis Academic, www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/us/lnacademic/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T5457678761&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T5457678764&cisb=22_T5457678763&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=271063&docNo=10. Some aspects of the media were

absent; for example, no satellite trucks were camped out on their lawn. The distinction in the way they were treated, compared to the way the families of random kidnap victims (be they truck drivers, soldiers, or civilian contractors) were treated, was so stark as to be unavoidable.

160. When Carroll was kidnapped, her identity was effectively “embargoed,” kept out of press reports, for 48 hours, at the request of the *Monitor*. This seems entirely reasonable. (By the same token, when two Fox News personnel were kidnapped in Gaza, the story was downplayed at the request of Fox News, on the theory—apparently correct—that if less was made of the story, the kidnappers would conclude they had taken men of little value and eventually release them.) The question is how prepared the press is to participate in such embargoes when the victims are not reporters. See Jack Shafer, “The Carroll Kidnapping: What Information Should Reporters Suppress?” *Slate.com*, January 10, 2006, available from www.slate.com/id/2134093/.

161. John Dillin, “NBC News President Defends, But Revises, Terrorism Coverage, *Christian Science Monitor*, August 5, 1985, p. 3; Eleanor Randolph, “Networks Turn Eye on Themselves: In Crisis, Restraint Viewed as Important but Dismissed as Impossible,” *Washington Post*, June 30, 1985, p. A-25; America’s Ordeal by Television: With the Beirut Hostages Free, Videoland Forgets Oh So Quickly,” *Washington Post*, July 2, 1985, p. C1. On a related instance, NBC’s interview of the lead Achille Lauro hijacker, which they secured on the grounds that they keep his location secret, see Philip Geyelin, “How to Protect a Terrorist,” *Washington Post*, May 19, 1986, p. A-15.

162. Again, in the updating of Hoffman’s book, much of the case study of TWA 847 has fallen away. But it is worth tracking down the 1998 edition of the book for the chapter, “Terrorism, the Media, and Public Opinion,” pp. 131-155, for so much of it remains relevant.

163. Brigitte L. Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media: From the Iran Hostage Crisis to the Oklahoma City Bombing*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994 ed., p. 50. She also quotes CBS’s Tom Fenton as reporting that during the embassy siege in Tehran, reporters were offered unpublished classified documents from the embassy in return for 5 minutes of unedited air time.

164. Raphael Cohen-Almagor, "Media Acts of Terrorism: Troubling Episodes and Suggested Guidelines," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 30, 2005, pp. 400.

165. It was reported during this time period that the soldiers' IDs were found. "ID Cards of Missing Soldiers Found," *CNN.com*, June 4, 2007, available from www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/06/04/missing.soldiers/index.html. I was told about the discovery of the video by a reporter from a major national media outlet who covered Iraq extensively and is in a position to have this information.

166. Hassan M. Fattah, "Militia Rebuked by Some Arab Countries," *New York Times*, July 17, 2006, nytimes.com, available from www.nytimes.com/2006/07/17/world/middleeast/17arab.html?fta=y.

167. The report was released in the United States (in sections) by the American Jewish Congress. See Reuven Erlich *et al.*, "Hezbollah's Use of Lebanese Civilian's as Human Shields: the Extensive Military Infrastructure Positioned and Hidden in Populated Areas," n.p.: Gelilot, Israel: The Intelligence and Terrorism Center at the Center for Special Studies, November 2006, section 1, available from www.ajcongress.org/site/DocServer/part1.pdf?docID=701.

168. Greg Myre, "Offering Video, Israel Answers Critics On War," *New York Times*, December 5, 2008, nytimes.com, available from www.nytimes.com/2006/12/05/world/middleeast/05mideast.html?ex=1322974800&en=b8b25a9e380122ff&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss.

169. Go to www.youtube.com/user/idfnadesk, accessed January 2, 2009. Apparently YouTube has removed some of the uploaded videos, which—given their response to complaints about Islamist videos, noted above—some commentators are calling a double standard. See Noah Pollack, "What YouTube Doesn't Want You to See," *Contentions.com*, posted December 30, 2008, available from www.commentarymagazine.com/blogs/index.php/pollak/48462.

170. Noam Cohen, "The Toughest Q's Answered in the Briefest Tweets," *New York Times*, January 3, 2009, nytimes.com,

available from www.nytimes.com/2009/01/04/weekinreview/04cohen.html?ref=weekinreview.

171. More combat footage, however, seems to be posted to the site *Liveleak.com*. I have done no numerical analysis, that is simply this author's impression.

172. Compare virtually anything posted by American personnel to *Liveleak* to, for example, "Ruins of Nineveh in Mosul," posted to the MNF-I channel on December 15, 2008, which doesn't even have a narration. Available from www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTforK9Jc1k.

173. Jim Krane, AP, "US Forces Storm Fallujah," *Washington Times*, November 8, 2004, available from www.washingtontimes.com/world/20041108-125353-3217r.htm.

174. Jim Miklaszewski explicitly reported on November 8, "At the same time, the US military will be fighting a propaganda war. As their first target last night, US and Iraqi troops seized Fallujah's general hospital to keep the insurgents from inflating the numbers of civilians killed or wounded." *NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw*, NBC News, Lexis Nexis Academic. Interestingly, there was no suggestion in the report that there might have been a reason the marines would consider such a possibility, for example, that prior numbers might have been inflated and erroneously reported.

175. The ways in which the press suggested that what had been accomplished in Fallujah was not that important shifted over the course of the operation. The bottom line was that, since terrorist attacks continued in other parts of the country, even appeared to increase in the short term, and since the need to telegraph the operation to permit civilians to get out of the way also permitted terrorist leaders to leave, the operation (if not an out and out failure) was not portrayed as being a complete success, either. Thus Jamie McIntyre of CNN on November 10: "Mosques, used by insurgents as command posts, have come under heavy attack. But with most of Falluja resembling a ghost town, it is now growing more apparent that along with much of the population, many of the insurgents fled in advance of the assault. What is left appears to be a small number of desperate and disorganized remnants." *Wolf Blitzer Reports*, CNN, Lexis Nexis Academic.

176. In response to the question, "Do you think the US should keep military troops in Iraq until a stable government is established there, or do you think the US should bring its troops home as soon as possible?" In a Pew Research Center Poll on November 3, 58 percent of the respondents said "keep troops there" and 39 percent said "bring troops home." However, on the next polling period beginning on December 19, 63 percent said "keep troops there," and only 32 percent said "bring them home" Reprinted in *Pollingreport.com*, available from www.pollingreport.com/iraq4.htm.

177. Sean Edwards, *Complex Environments: Battle of Fallujah I, April 2004* (Classified), Charlottesville, VA: U.S. Army National Ground Intelligence Center, March 31, 2006, pp. 13-14. I quote only paragraphs marked *U*, or Unclassified.

178. Edwards, *Complex Environments*, p. 14.

179. Bacon.

180. *Ibid.*

181. *Ibid.*